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**Understanding Shifts in the Language Learning
Strategies of Newly Arrived Arabic Learners Studying
in the UK: An Illustrative Phenomenographic Case
Study**

by

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Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of Warwick, Centre for Education Studies

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any university or other institution of tertiary education. Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given.

Signed:

Date:

ABSTRACT

As of 2015, forty golden years have passed since the language learning strategy (LLS) concept was first brought to wide attention by Joan Rubin (1975). Most previous LLS research, however, has been based on the cognitivist theoretical framework and conducted quantitatively, using survey tools. Surveys have essentially failed to capture the ‘situated experiences’ of language learners and their actual and dynamic use of LLSs across time and space. With the above in mind and being motivated by my personal experiences as one of thousands of Arab students moving abroad to pursue education through the medium of English, this thesis reports on a longitudinal phenomenographic inquiry into Arab university students’ creative efforts and engagement in learning English prior to and after their coming to the UK to attend both short and long academic programmes (i.e. the pre-sessional language course and a postgraduate programme). Underpinned by a sociocultural viewpoint, the inquiry consisted of four research stages, and espoused qualitative research methods for data collection, which lasted for 17 months. A series of individual semi-structured interviews provided the main data, with other qualitative methods such as learner diaries and written narrative supplementing the validity and reliability of the study. For data analysis, Braun and Clarke’s (2006, 2013) systematic guidelines for conducting thematic analysis (TA) were adopted to identify and interpret patterns of meaning (themes) across the qualitative data in rich detail.

The data revealed that participants’ strategy use was non-static and always directed towards the achievement of a specific learning goal. As LLSs did not operate alone, a conceptual framework was proposed in this study to discern the distinctive features of participants’ situated strategy use in both contexts. This framework was based on Dörnyei’s (2009) distinction between two types of possible selves (i.e. the ideal self and the ought self),

Higgins' (2000) distinction between the promotion and prevention aspects of instrumentality, Malcolm's (2013) concept of 'required motivation' and my own distinction between immature, short-term and long-term learning goals and that of compulsory (i.e. largely regulated by cultural beliefs) and voluntary (i.e. basically internalised within the self) strategies. The participants' changing language learning goals and associated strategies in their homelands and the UK were largely shaped and regulated by their situated social networks, including family members, teachers, peers and others. The changes in assessment modes and the availability of language learning resources (e.g. technologies) were also found to have mediated their strategy use.

This study concludes by providing recommendations for Arab students who are considering pursuing their studies abroad in English-speaking education systems, for study abroad programme designers and teachers in the host country, and for educators in the Arab and Asian countries by suggesting specific practical steps such as 'adopting a near peer role modelling approach' and 'fostering the motivational force of International Posture and National Interest among students'. Further research is needed to examine the key role of contextual realities on learners' strategy use, and to help teachers provide appropriate support to language learners in particular learning contexts.

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LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

Jointly with my supervisor Professor David Wray, I have succeeded in publishing some papers throughout my mental journey of my doctoral research:

- 1) **2013.** 'Investigating Humanistic Elements in Global Textbooks: The Case of New Headway Intermediate (4th Edition) Student's Book'. *Folio*, 15.2, 33-39.
- 2) **2013.** 'A Response to Calls for Moving Away from Language Learning Strategy Research'. (Co-authored with David Wray). In International Academic Forum (IAFOR) (Ed.) *The European Conference on Language Learning: Conference Proceedings 2013*. Nagoya, Japan: IAFOR. pp. 725-740.
- 3) **2014.** 'Designing 'Strategy-Rich L2 Textbooks' for Language Learner Autonomy'. (Co-authored with David Wray). *Folio*, 16.1, 23-27
- 4) **2014.** 'A Critical Review of the Fundamental Directions on Language Learning Strategy Research'. (Co-authored with David Wray). *Journal of Academic Perspectives*, 5.2, 1-16
- 5) **In press.** 'Helping Learners Learn: Exploring Strategy Instruction into Language Learning Textbooks'. (Co-authored with David Wray). In Tomlinson B., Mishan, F. & Mashuhara, H. (Eds) *Practice and Theory in Materials Development in Language Learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars.
- 6) **Initial acceptance.** 'Mediated Strategic Language Learning: One Learner's Story'. (Co-authored with David Wray). *System*.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

LSM	Learner Self-Management
GLL	Good Language Learner
LLS	Language Learning Strategy
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ESL	English as a Second Language
IDs	Individual Differences
TEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
TBS	Text-Based Study
SILL	Strategy Inventory for Language Learning
LLHs	Language Learning Histories
TA	Thematic Analysis
NSOE	Native Speaker of English
DA	Dynamic Assessment
NPRMs	Near Peer Role Models

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) counted 4.1 million students, studying outside of their country of citizenship in 2011 (OECD, 2012: 360). This number is expected to double by 2020 (Coleman, 2013: 20). More than half of the students are enrolled in English-speaking education systems, principally the UK and Australia (ibid). According to Benson et al. (2013: 3), the construct of ‘study abroad’ refers to ‘any period spent overseas, for which study is part of the purpose’. Therefore, the outcomes of studying a second language or through the medium of a second language in study abroad contexts appear to emerge at both personal and linguistic levels (ibid). In this regard, Al-Zubaidi (2012: 108) posits that while students from Arab backgrounds are often able to make outstanding contributions in their home countries, many encounter different challenges during their overseas sojourn. As a result, they need to improve their linguistic competence in order to survive and succeed while they are abroad (Gao, 2010a; Irie and Ryan, 2014).

Tran (2013: 126-127) in turn contends that much of the research on study abroad has merely focused on the difficulties that overseas students might face in adjusting themselves to an unfamiliar environment, and pays less attention to how these students can act agentively to gain entry into the desired social networks. Some language learning researchers (e.g. Chamot, 2009; Cohen, 2011; Oxford, 1990; Macaro, 2001) have suggested that one possible way for learners to deal with such a situation is for them to employ a specific set of language learning strategies (LLSs) that address their specific learning settings and learning goals.

Interest in LLSs remains intense because of its apparent potential in the fostering of effective teaching and learning (Griffiths, 2013: 1). This is evidenced by its ongoing presence in the literature (e.g. Cohen, 2011; Cohen and Griffiths, in press; Griffiths and Oxford, 2014; Oxford, 2011). A great number of LLS empirical studies, including the studies on strategy use among Arabic-speaking students learning English, have adopted cognitivist approaches, and used survey methods to describe the static aspect of learners' strategy use (e.g. Abu-Radwan, 2011; El-Dib, 2004; Griffiths, 2003, 2006; Nyikos and Oxford, 1993). In many of these studies, learners' strategy use was associated with the exercise of their cognitive and metacognitive activities, and was seen as an essential cause of variation in language learners' learning achievements (for more elaboration, see Chapter 2).

LLS research has attracted vigorous debate, due to the conceptual ambiguities of the term 'learning strategy', and the questionable results obtained from the survey methods (Dörnyei, 2005, LoCastro, 1994). Therefore, some researchers utilising socially oriented theoretical approaches call for a shift in theorising LLS, together with other concepts, including language learners, learning, and context (Gao, 2010a; Norton and Toohey, 2001). They have pinpointed a commensurate need for more qualitative, holistic perspectives in LLS research to capture the 'lived experience of learners in real-life contexts' (Palfreyman, 2003: 244). This has lent support to carrying out LLS studies underpinned by a sociocultural standpoint. These studies, however, are 'still relatively rare' (Mason, 2010: 647). To the best of my knowledge, the present longitudinal qualitative research represents the first LLS study that has addressed Arab learners' dynamic strategy use from a sociocultural viewpoint in a range of different settings in the UK, including their past language experiences.

This introductory chapter gives an overall background to the study. It starts with a description of the rising role of English in the Arab world, which has led to an increasing number of Arab students embarking on study abroad. Then it offers a brief overview of my own educational experiences as an Arab postgraduate who has studied on academic programmes in the UK. After that, the significance of conducting this research will be discussed, before outlining the structure and purpose of each chapter in this thesis.

1.2 The Changing Role of English in the Arab World and its Consequences

The modern history of the Arab world goes back to the post-First World War settlement (Rawaf and Hassounah, 2014: 138). At present, the Arab world comprises 22 countries, created by the European powers (ibid). The Arabs are people of Semitic origin, living largely in Iraq, Syria the Arabian Peninsula, the Maghreb region of North Africa, Egypt and Mauritania (Al-Khatib, 2006: 2). Arabs are united by the use of Arabic as their native tongue (ibid). A great unifying force of Arabs is Islam, the religion of 95% of all Arabs (ibid).

Teaching English and other European languages in the Arab world can be traced back to the 1920s, when different parts of the region were under British and French mandates (ibid: 3). Van-den-Hoven (2014: 67-68) argues that during most of the twentieth century, English was treated in the Arab world as ‘the language of a colonizing and bellicose West’. There was also a fear that learning more English could cause a weakening of Arabic, which is the language of the Quran (ibid). In this view, English belongs to the West and Arabic to Islam (ibid). This in turn led to delaying the introduction of English in the school curriculum, confining English to the classroom, and accepting the fact that students entering the university would have a poor command of English (El-Ezabi, 2014: X). At that time, there

was ‘a protracted resistance to accepting new findings and strong evidence’ that refuted this misconception (i.e. learning English has diverse effects on Arabic competence) (ibid). Nonetheless, a few wealthy families in the Arab world used to send their male children abroad for higher education, as a means of maintaining distinction from other social class groups (ibid: XI).

By the end of the twentieth century, the flourishing of business and communications technology ‘forced Arab states to reevaluate their positions’ towards the learning of foreign languages, especially English (Ridolfo, 2001: 915). English has become the world language of business, science, technology and communication. In this respect, El-Ezabi (2014: X) argues that most citizens in Arab countries (especially in the Gulf States) recognise that ‘a high standard of proficiency in English is a critical requirement for effective education and for access to, and utilization of, new knowledge and new technology’. As a result, English is currently taught in Arab schools from an early stage, usually from the fourth grade (Esseili, 2014: 101). In the Gulf region, English is starting to be used as a medium of instruction in the teaching of content courses of many university subjects (Van-den-Hoven, 2014: 65). Moreover, almost all Arab countries have adopted a strategy of sending a number of students abroad, most often to English medium universities, at the government’s expense (ibid: 66).

Public enthusiasm for learning English in the Arab world has encouraged some parents, especially the highly educated, to send their children to private schools in which English is emphasised, or employ private tutors, so that they can secure a better future for their children (Sobhy, 2012: 47). Consequently, the task of upgrading English language proficiency has recently been seen by many Arab students as ‘a necessary precursor to academic success’ and professional development, given that in some Arab countries Arabs are required to work with people from different parts of the world to execute specific projects (Malcolm, 2013:

100). Qatar, for example, is set to host the FIFA World Cup in 2022. As a part of its preparation for the World Cup events, Qatar has employed architects, civil engineers and other workers from Nepal, Spain, the United States and some Arab countries to build stadia (Tucker, 2014: 178). English is often the language used between the workers of the projects to communicate (ibid). One of the outcomes of increasing concerns as regards learning and mastering English in the Arab world is the outflow of Arab students, mainly those from the Arab Gulf region, to overseas institutions (Malcolm, 2011: 206).

1.3 The Researcher's Personal Experiences

In relation to the growing interest on the part of Arab students as regards moving abroad to pursue English medium education, I myself experienced at first hand the phenomenon of Arab students pursuing their academic studies in the medium of English abroad, as an MA and subsequently a doctoral student at Warwick University in the UK. My motivation for undertaking this research within the area of LLS research arose from my language learning experiences before and after my arrival in the UK. This is because the study abroad experience does not begin in the minds of learners at the airport departure gate, in that how learners see themselves and how they approach language learning in their homelands often influence the shape of their personal study abroad goals (Irie and Ryan, 2014: 416).

My English language learning started at Grade 7 in an intermediate state school in Syria when I was 12 years old. Although I was not explicitly introduced to the concept of LLSs during my stay in Syria, I was never without strategies. Throughout my school education, I used some LLSs, mostly for classroom study and examinations. For example, I used to memorise words and texts assigned by my English teachers, complete the exercises and check

my answers from the back of the book, as well as asking one of my family members to prepare a lesson in advance to participate inside the classroom.

Encouraged by my parents, I majored in English literature at Aleppo University in Syria. For my academic studies at university, memorising and repetition strategies remained my dominant LLSs, with the result that I could accomplish my ultimate goal of being one of the top students to win a scholarship to the UK. However, I was simultaneously cognisant of the need to actively create and seek language learning opportunities beyond the classroom in Syria. Therefore, I embraced three effective strategies: (1) working voluntarily during the summer vacations as a tourist guide to Aleppo landmarks, (2) subscribing to a weekly English newspaper, and (3) meeting up with three classmates on Fridays to practise English together. In effect, technology played a secondary role in improving my English before coming to the UK in 2009, because of its scarcity in public educational settings, the banning of some popular social networking sites such as YouTube and Facebook, a slow Internet connection and inability to afford a smartphone. After graduating from the university, I spent two years teaching English at Aleppo University before I pursued my higher degree in the UK.

During my stay abroad, I noticed an increasing number of Arab students, in particular those from the Gulf Arab countries, coming to the UK driven by a desire to attain better academic credentials and improve their English proficiency. Many of these students, including myself, have little or no prior travel experience. Therefore, they have few ideas about how to cope with the academic, linguistic and cultural challenges in the new setting (Benson et al, 2013: 152). In the first term of my MA programme at the Centre for Applied Linguistics at Warwick, I deployed almost the same LLSs that I had previously used when I was studying in Syria, such as reading every page of an article several times and trying to memorise some

sentences by heart, along with checking the meaning of nearly each new word in the text. In effect, the use of these strategies in the UK led me to spend a lot of time, and accordingly give up socialising with individuals in non-academic settings in the UK to finish my postgraduate assignments. These were the only strategies that I knew until I came across *Language Learning Strategies: What Every Teacher Should Know* by Rebecca Oxford (1990), as one of the set texts recommended by the module tutor in the second term of my MA programme. At that time, I recognised that I needed to use different strategies because many of my past LLSs were no longer valid in the new learning setting, where a learner-centred approach was adopted.

My language learning experiences taught me a valuable lesson, namely that we need to develop sound strategies which are appropriate to the situation and the task at hand, along with our changing learning goals. This is because there is almost nothing we cannot attain with sufficient effort and determination, although different contextual conditions (e.g. teachers' teaching practices and parents' level and manner of involvement) can leave a mark in this regard. In effect, carrying out in-depth investigations into understanding the language learning experiences of learners from an Arab background is still considered to be 'the least research-and development-intensive area in the world' (Ahmed, 2011: 122). This issue was unequivocally expressed by the Arab Knowledge Report (2009) which, as Gitsaki (2011: xiv) describes, highlighted the importance of conducting further empirical studies on the challenges that many Arab learners often face when studying in both local and overseas academic communities, and how they deal with these challenges.

In this longitudinal qualitative research, the UK, where the participants were geographically away from their family members, seemed to be an ideal setting to explore a group of Arab university learners' dynamic and situated use of LLSs from a sociocultural perspective, a

perspective which has rarely been pursued in LLS research (Gao, 2010a, 2013a; Norton and Toohey, 2001).

1.4 Background of the Participants

The present study involved a group of university students from an Arabic background, who came to the UK to pursue postgraduate studies in English in one of its leading universities. The overwhelming majority of Arabs who complete their higher studies abroad are ‘elite’ learners in terms of academic achievement, in particular those who study on government scholarships (Hourani and Hourani, 2002: 392). Furthermore, most of these learners come from well-off and/or highly-educated urban families (ibid). All participants in this research were Arab Muslims, and Arabic was their native language (for more details about participants, see Chapter 3).

English and Arabic descend from two different language families, Germanic and Semitic respectively (Javed, 2013: 1). Therefore, there are significant differences between the two languages. The Arabic alphabet has 28 letters, whereas the English alphabet includes 26 letters. Unlike English, Arabic is written and read from right to left, and is always written in cursive letters (ibid: 10). Additionally, Arabic letters change their shape according to their position in a word, to facilitate the joining-up of the letters in a cursive alphabet (ibid). In English, every normal sentence must contain a verb. However, the Arabic sentence may not do so, and is called ‘a nominal sentence’ consisting of a subject and a predicate (Allen, 2014: 85). The following examples epitomise this idea:

Table 1: Examples of Nominal Sentences in Arabic

Translation	Arabic sentences
The students [are] American.	الطلاب الامريكيون
The bird [is] over the tree.	العصفور فوق الشجرة
My book [is] my friend.	كتابي صديقي

Moreover, Arabic has a very consistent relationship between letters and sounds (grapheme and phoneme), while English has more complex representations (Saigh and Schmitt, 2012: 26). For example, the word ‘teach’ in English consists of five letters and three sounds, whereas the same word in Arabic includes four letters and sounds simultaneously. Therefore, Arabs sometimes produce misspelled English words. The Arab speakers of English often confuse /p/ and /v/ with /b/ and /f/ respectively, given that the two sounds /p/ and /v/ do not exist in Arabic. For example, some Arabs pronounce the word ‘people’ as /'bi:bəl/ instead of /'pi:pəl/. The above discussion indicates that it is not easy for Arabs to learn English. Notably, English borrowed many scientific words from Arabic such as Alcohol, Alchemy, Algebra, Almanac, cipher, cotton, diary, sash...etc. (Formkin, Rodman, and Lyams, 2009: 359).

1.5 Significance of this Study

The main contributions of this thesis can be summarised as follows:

- This study represents the first longitudinal, qualitative study in the LLS field that seeks to capture a rich and contextualised picture of LLSs used by a group of postgraduate Arab learners in a study abroad context from a sociocultural perspective, including their past language learning experiences. This is because almost all previous published LLS studies

on strategy use among Arabic-speaking students learning English have been based on cognitivist theories and conducted quantitatively.

- LLS research has often limited itself to formal educational settings, including the few studies underpinned by a sociocultural standpoint (Donato and McCormick, 1994; Coyle, 2007). Coyle (2007: 77), for instance, defines LLSs as a ‘by-product of classroom culture’. The present study aims to underpin the fact that language learners’ strategic learning efforts can be an emerging process through their interaction with a myriad of situated contextual realities in both formal and informal settings. Therefore, this research discerns the participants’ language learning process from a holistic stance.
- In Cohen’ and Griffiths’ (in press) forthcoming article *‘Revisiting LLS Research 40 Years Later’*, twenty-five LLS experts ‘present their wish list of possible research to take us into the next four decades’. Rebecca Oxford, for example, suggests that forthcoming LLS research needs to adopt ‘a person-in-context relational view...in the conducting of in-depth learner case studies based on written or oral learner histories, with an eye to collecting rich data on learner strategies, emotion, and identity’. The present longitudinal qualitative case study can be seen as an answer to Oxford’s call. This is because this study has used the participants’ oral and written accounts of their language learning experiences and their dynamic interactions with different contextual conditions, with the aim of capturing the close-knit intersection between the participants’ learning goals, strategy use and identity formation and development.
- The findings of this research may provide further insightful and useful guidance to Arab university students (and possibly Asians) who are thinking of pursuing their higher studies abroad in English-speaking education systems, about the linguistic and non-linguistic challenges that they might face, the impacts of these on them and how they can manage these challenges. Moreover, the present study could provide insights to language

teachers and policy makers in the Arab world and the UK about the kinds of support that they can offer to Arab students, especially in terms of the development of competence in academic English.

1.6 Outline of this Thesis

This thesis consists of nine chapters. Chapter 1 starts with background information considering the increasing role of English in the Arab world, followed by the motivation for conducting this research. The background of the participants and the significance of the study are also explained, before outlining the organisation of this thesis.

Chapter 2 presents a detailed review of LLS research, justifying the use of a sociocultural perspective in this longitudinal qualitative research. As there are many reviews of LLS research, this review does not duplicate such efforts. Rather, it aims to respond to calls to move away from language learning strategy research, and rather accentuate the prominence of investigating LLS as a state (i.e. actual and dynamic deployment of strategies in accordance with changing settings and learning goals). For this purpose, two main ideas are highlighted: ‘strategic interaction with contexts, and goal-orientation’.

Chapter 3 focuses on the methodological approach used in this study, namely phenomenography as a qualitative methodological framework. It describes the ontological, epistemological and methodological underpinnings of phenomenography, along with the rationale of adopting it in this research.

Chapter 4 presents the research design of the study, by explaining the criteria adopted for selecting the participants and setting, along with my journey of data collection.

Chapter 5 describes the analytical process of this research with reference to Braun' and Clarke's (2006, 2013) systematic guidelines to carrying out thematic analysis (TA).

Chapters 6 and 7 present the findings of this research. Chapter 6 gives a synopsis of each participant's biography, before describing their language learning experiences in their Arab homelands, with special focus on their strategy use and learning motivations. This first stage of data analysis represents a baseline for the inquiry in its subsequent stages. Chapter 7 explains the participants' shifting strategy use, learning motivations and identity development during their entire stay in the UK (i.e., between 9 July 2012 and 28 November 2013). By doing this, the ongoing interplay between learner agency and contextual conditions can be better understood.

Chapter 8 discusses the findings of the study with reference to other studies and the framework that I developed to capture the close relationships between the participants' learning goals and motivations, strategy use and identity development.

Chapter 9 concludes this study with the implications of my findings, the advantages and limitations of the study and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out to explain and justify the sociocultural perspective to language learning strategy (LLS) research utilised in the current research. In this chapter, which is concerned with reviewing the literature pertaining to the field of LLS research, three broad directions have been followed by language learning researchers:

- a) exploration of a universal set of characteristics of good language learners (GLLs) to be taught to the less successful learners;
- b) delineation of the relationships between metacognitive knowledge and strategy use and the factors affecting strategy choice; and
- c) in-depth inquiry into the development and use of LLSs through mediation and situated learning from sociocultural perspectives. This direction is undertaken in the present research.

This chapter is divided into three parts. The first focuses on changing perspectives with regard to the concept of a Good Language Learner (GLL), the definitional issues relevant to the construct of LLSs and the fundamental contributions of LLSs in the field of language learning. The next part sheds light on the major criticisms directed at LLS research. Guided by cognitivist theories, the suggestions seek to replace the construct of LLS with that of self-regulation, and the responses to such calls by proponents of LLS research. The last part of the chapter concerns the ‘the social turn’ in language learning research and how it underpins the importance of adopting a sociocultural theoretical framework in further LLS studies, by describing some sociocultural LLS studies.

2.2 A Review of Language Learning Strategy Research

2.2.1 Good Language Learner (GLL) Strategies: Criticism and Insights

The initial spark for the language learning strategy (LLS) field came from Rubin's (1975) concern for discerning the characteristics of the prototypical 'good language learner' (GLL) that were believed to lead to their success in language learning (Cohen and Macaro, 2007; Griffiths, 2010). At that time (1970), the focus was on the methods and products of language teaching, suggesting that 'good teaching automatically meant good learning' (Cohen, 2011: 683). In this regard, Rubin's (1975) seminal article on the GLL developed an exploration of 'how learners manage their learning and the strategies they use as a means of improving their target language competence' (White, 2008: 8). Based on her observations of the language learning process of GLLs in English-speaking classroom contexts including California and Hawaii, Rubin (1975: 44-47) generated her seven-strategy list, presumed to be essential for all 'good L2 learners':

- paying attention to meaning;
- attending to form (i.e., grammar);
- being extroverted and uninhibited about mistakes;
- monitoring their own speech and that of others;
- making reasoned guesses when not sure;
- willing to practise the target language whenever possible; and
- having a strong drive to communicate and to learn through communication.

These strategies, as Rubin (1975: 50) pointed out, could be taught to less successful learners, and this would enable them to find their own means to success. Other researchers have worked on similar lines. Stern (1975: 316), for instance, identified ten

top strategies as the ‘features that mark out good language learning’ (for the full list, refer to Appendix 1). At the top of the list he put ‘personal learning style or positive learning strategy’ (ibid). Stern (1975), meanwhile, made no clear distinction between strategy’ and ‘learning style’, which is often defined as ‘the general approach preferred by the student when [...] learning a language’ (Oxford, 2003: 273). The difficulty of defining the term ‘learning strategy’ will be elucidated in the next section. Naiman et al. (1978) conducted the first empirical study on GLLs through carrying out different interviews with thirty-four English-speaking students learning French in Canada. Based on their data, Naiman et al. (1978: 225) listed five broad strategies as ‘essential for successful language learning’:

- adopting an active task approach (e.g. intensifying efforts where necessary and identifying problems)
- using the language in real communication;
- developing the language as a separate system (e.g. making guesses about language and responding to clues);
- reviewing L2 performance and making adjustments; and
- managing the affective demands of language learning.

The above discussion concurs with Griffiths’ (2013: 45) argument that the lack of agreement among ‘these three important early studies’ (i.e., the works of Rubin, Stern and Naiman et al.) casts doubt on the nature of the construct ‘learning strategy’, as will be explained in the coming section. According to Hardan (2013: 1716), early LLS researchers (e.g. Cohen, 1977; Naiman et al., 1978; Politzer, 1983; Reiss, 1981; Rubin, 1975) considered GLLs as using a larger number and range of strategies than the less successful learners, who were ‘inactive’ learners. This assumption is articulated by Wenden (1985: 7), who states that ‘ineffective learners are inactive learners’ and that ‘their apparent inability to learn is, in fact, due to their

not having an appropriate repertoire of learning strategies'. Therefore, less effective learners may benefit from coaching in LLSs.

The assumption of the existence of a single profile for a GLL has been susceptible to criticism by many researchers (e.g. Macaro, 2010; Oxford and Lee, 2008; Stevick, 1990), given that listing only the repertoire of possible LLSs deployed by some GLLs appears to disparage language learners' individual variation and their agency i.e. 'the human capacity to act on informed choices' (Benson and Cooker, 2013a: 7). As Grenfell (2000: 14) emphasises, 'what works for one learner may not work for another'. Moreover, the actual strategic behaviours of language learners basically vary in accordance with the particular context and their linguistic level (Cohen and Macaro, 2007: 13). The difficulty of defining a universal set of LLSs, as Murphy (2008: 304) notes, alludes to the possibility that 'strategy use *per se* doesn't necessarily lead to success'. Furthermore, Rubin (2005: 47-48) critically reflects on the earliest descriptions of the GLL, stating that they focused largely on cognitive strategies: 'guessing, use of cognates, practicing, analyzing, categorising', and to a lesser extent on social and affective strategies such as being extroverted and uninhibited about mistakes and asking questions for clarification. Nonetheless, there was 'incipient reference to procedures or metacognitive strategies' i.e., the process of how the GLL strategies identified are used (ibid).

In the mid-1980s, some LLS researchers (e.g. Green and Oxford, 1995; Porte, 1988; Purpura, 1998; Vann and Abraham, 1990) ascribed the limited success of previous LLS studies to inadequate knowledge of LLSs used by less successful learners. In other words, comparing the LLSs used by good and less successful learners was seen as a catalyst for developing learners' target language competence. The general findings from these studies were that the main weakness of the under-achieving learners was a result of their lack of *appropriateness*

and *flexibility* in using LLSs in the given contexts rather than the *quantity* and *variety* of the LLSs they used (Chamot, 2005: 120 ; Gu, 1996: 647).

Based on Di Pietro's (1987: 13) assumption that 'anyone who is not suffering a learning disability is capable of successfully learning a foreign language', Porte (1988), for instance, carried out semi-structured interviews with fifteen Italian less successful learners of English, whose scores were noticeably low in both placement tests and homework. Porte's (1988: 168) study suggested that the less successful learners tended to use many LLSs similar to those usually used by the GLLs, such as the use of dictionary and inferring from context. However, the major flaw with under-achieving learners was in applying inappropriate LLSs to a particular activity, as a result of learners' transferring their LLSs across different learning situations. One of Porte's (1988) participants, Maria, for instance, deployed a particular set of LLSs when studying at an Italian school, such as using a bilingual dictionary and giving the translated equivalent. Although these LLSs worked well for Maria in Italy, she later discovered that her past LLSs were no longer valid in the new learning situation in London where a learner-centred approach was advocated.

Likewise, Vann and Abraham (1990), in a case study focusing on two less successful Saudi Arabian female learners, used a think-aloud procedure along with product analysis on three language tasks (a verb exercise, a cloze passage, and a composition) to unearth the lack of success of these two learners in an intensive English program. One of the principal findings of Vann and Abraham's (1990) study was that the two learners were active strategy users, employing many LLSs such as paying attention to overall meaning and monitoring their errors. However, the difference between these two less successful and other GLLs' strategy use lay in the degree of appropriateness and flexibility in using LLSs, and their skill in matching choice of strategy to the demands of the task. For example, one of the two less

successful learners used the low-level strategies (e.g. paying attention to the grammatical knowledge) effective for the verb tense exercise for carrying out tasks that require higher-level strategies (e.g. deducing the overall meaning). In sum, the results of Porte's (1988) study and that of Vann and Abraham (1990) called into question the claim of Wenden (1985: 7) that 'ineffective learners are inactive learners'.

Given that no single model of a GLL exists and addressing the empirical studies that examined how less successful learners approached their language learning, some LLS researchers (e.g. Anderson, 2008, 2012; Chamot, 2009; Littlejohn, 2008; Oxford, 1996; Rubin, 1994, 2013) have suggested that L2 learners need to develop some degree of metacognition to identify their own learning goals and select the strategies required to complete a specific learning task. Kozulin (2005: 2) describes metacognition as 'the higher level of mental activity, involving knowledge, awareness, and control of one's lower level of cognitive skills, operations, and strategies'. Having metacognitive knowledge can cause language learners to have a greater awareness and control of 'how they learn and how they react to successes and setbacks in learning' (Anderson 2012, 170) (for more elaboration about metacognition, see Section 2.2.3.1). To this end, the viability of integrating strategy instruction into language programmes and language learning materials has been given a considerable amount of significance by some LLS researchers (e.g. Cohen, 2011; Ellis and Sinclair, 1989; Littlejohn, 2008; Murphey, 2008; Reinders, 2011), based on the premise that 'there is little or no variation in the use of metacognitive strategies by GLLs' (Rubin, 2005: 53).

This interest in the notion of strategy instruction, as Murphy (2008: 186) claims, has increased after identifying various taxonomies and inventories of LLSs which assist in effective language learning (e.g. Dörnyei, 2005; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990)

(see Section 2.2.3.1). Nonetheless, some researchers in LLS (e.g. Larsen-Freeman, 2001; Rees-Miller, 1993; LoCastro, 1994) have responded differently to the value of strategy instruction. Rees-Miller (1993: 687), for example, argues that although the notion of strategy instruction through focusing on metacognitive strategies seems to be ‘intuitively appealing’ to both language teachers and materials developers, some internal and external factors also need to be taken into account, such as gender, motivation, learning age and cultural background. She adds that teaching language learners a specific set of LLSs may deprive them of choosing and using the strategies that tailor their learning goals and wants (*ibid*). As a result, Rees-Miller (1993: 691) asserts that devoting class time to overt language work appears to be more profitable than teaching learners specific LLSs, or even incorporating them into language textbooks.

The aforementioned discussion has reviewed the characteristics of the GLL from the cognitivist perspective, which dominates the bulk of LLS research and supports the idea that language learning is an individual accomplishment and a GLL is the one who is internally motivated to learn the target language and has specific cognitive capabilities (Gao, 2010a). As Parks and Raymond (2004: 375) show, success at language learning from a cognitive psychological standpoint is primarily ‘a matter of individual initiative, notably in terms of strategy use and personal motivation’. In this regard, an improvised portrait of a language learner from this point of view is painted by reinforcing ‘the cognitive individual’ with paying a less central position to the salience of the social, cultural, historical, and political-economic situations in which a language learner is involved (Palfreyman, 2003: 244). Nonetheless, emphasis has been placed on the importance of the appropriateness and variations in LLS use, to accomplish learning tasks, principally metacognitive strategies.

A recent volume edited by Griffiths (2008), ‘Lessons from Good Language Learners’, charts more than 30 years of research since the emergence of Rubin’s (1975) landmark article on the GLL. The book included twenty-three chapters dealing with LLSs used by GLLSs for the receptive and productive skills, and for grammar and vocabulary. In a review of Griffiths’ (2008) book, Macaro (2010: 291) sees this work as focusing on the characteristics of the GLL, without explaining ‘*how to measure* a good language learner’ or knowing how ‘that GLL got his or her badge of honour!’ (author’s italics). According to Macaro (2010: 293), in order to learn lessons from a GLL, we need to ‘know a lot more about learners than simply a snapshot in time of their proficiency level’. Reinforcing his point, Macaro (2010: 292) enquires ‘[I]s a GLL someone who has achieved a level 8 in the IELTS test? Is this a better GLL than someone who has achieved a level 6? Clearly not. Or at least not necessarily’. To some extent, Norton and Toohey (2001: 310) address Macaro’s (2010) inquiry by taking a sociocultural stance and concluding that the proficiencies of GLLs ‘were bound up not only with what they did individually but also in the possibilities their various communities offered them’.

To demonstrate this argument, Norton and Toohey (2001) reviewed two examples of Polish-speaking learners of English in Canada (an adult learner, Eva, and a kindergarten learner, Julie), both of whom succeeded in exercising their agency in resisting and shaping the access to learning provided by their environments. In Eva’s case, although initially marginalised as an immigrant in her workplace community, she succeeded in achieving a more respected position among her co-workers and management by asking her partner to provide transport for her colleagues in his car in monthly outings. In addition to social resources, Eva employed her intellectual resources and her knowledge of Italian and of European countries. In similar vein, but in the very different social context of a kindergarten community, five-year-old Julie was looked at as ‘a desirable playmate with access to valued information’,

relying on her knowledge of Polish to teach her peers some words in addition to the important scaffolding that she gained from her adult cousin, Agatha, who was an experienced speaker of English and Polish (Norton and Toohey, 2001: 317).

With this in mind, Norton and Toohey (2001: 310) challenge the underlying assumption of cognitivist approaches to the GLL literature that largely hinges upon learners' motivation for learning languages and their control of a wider variety of linguistic forms and cognitive traits, without adequately taking into account the 'situated experiences of language learners in real-life contexts'. Surprisingly, perhaps, there is still very little existing literature on the GLL that tells us about how individuals struggle to gain a foothold in the contexts in which they find themselves (Benson and Cooker, 2013a: 2; Cohen and Griffiths, in press). This is the starting point for the current research.

2.2.2 Definitional Issues Regarding Language Learning Strategies

As reviewed in the previous section, early GLL studies initiated the emerging recognition of the role of the learner in language learning experience and the strategies they often use in learning and using second languages. However, there have been unsuccessful attempts to clarify the construct of LLS, because of 'the elusive nature of the term [strategy]' (Wenden and Rubin, 1987: 7) and its lack of theoretical soundness. The theoretical inconsistencies and conceptual ambiguities concerning the concept of LLS were first noted by Wenden (1991) and have subsequently been explored by other researchers utilising a LLS framework (e.g. Cohen, 2011; Dörnyei and Skehan, 2003; Ellis, 1994; Grenfell and Macaro, 2007; White, 2008). In looking for a definition pattern, Table 2 contains some definitions of the term LLS

suggested by prominent researchers in educational psychology. The original wording in these definitions is adhered to as closely as possible, but is subdivided into two.

Table 2: A Sample of Definitions of Language Learning Strategies (adopted from Wray and Hajar, 2013)

Perspective	Source	What are LLSs?	What are LLSs for?
Cognitive	Bialystok (1978: 71)	‘are optimal methods for exploiting available information’ and may be consciously employed by language learners	‘to improve competence in a second language’
Cognitive	Oxford (1989: 235)	‘behaviours or actions’ used consciously by learners	to make language learning more successful, self-directed and enjoyable
Cognitive	O’Malley and Chamot (1990:1)	‘the special thoughts or behaviours’ that learners consciously employ	to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information
Cognitive	Weinstein and Hume (1998: 12)	‘any thoughts, behaviours, beliefs, or emotions’ a learner involved in during learning	to facilitate the acquisition, integration, storage in memory, or availability for future use of new knowledge and skills.
Cognitive	Cohen (2012: 136)	‘thoughts and actions, consciously chosen and operationalized by language learners’	‘to assist them in carrying out a multiplicity of tasks’
Cognitive	Griffiths (2013: 15)	‘activities chosen by learners’	to regulate their own language learning

Sociocultural	Donato and McCormick (1994: 453)	‘a process directly connected to the practices of cultural groups’	to help ‘novices develop into competent members of these communities’
Sociocultural	Oxford and Schramm (2007: 48)	‘a learner’s socially mediated plan or action’	‘ to meet a learning goal’

The above table exemplifies differences in defining the construct of LLS, which Takać (2008: 50) sees as underpinning LLS researchers’ attempts to define the construct of LLS according to the focus of their own research. After examining the previous definitions of LLS, Macaro (2006) discusses four main problems pertaining to the theoretical foundations of LLS: (1) whether LLSs are observable or mental, or both; (2) whether LLSs refer to specific or general behaviour; (3) whether LLSs are conscious or unconscious; and (4) what motivates the use of LLSs .

(1) The first problem of LLSs mentioned by Macaro (2006: 322) is related to the nature of the LLSs by questioning whether they should be seen as either unobservable mental operations such as selective attention, or observable behaviour such as seeking out a conversation partner and taking notes in a lecture, or both. Stevick (1990: 144) calls this problem ‘the Outside-Inside Problem’, which suggests that there is ‘no clear relationship between external acts and the mental constructs to which they are attributed’. According to Grenfell and Macaro (2007: 18), it seems difficult and ‘atheoretical’ to suggest that the inner cognitive operation and the overt behaviour are condensed within one concept i.e. LLS.

Considering the definitions of LLS exemplified above, many researchers adopting cognitive psychology frameworks in their LLS studies (e.g. Cohen, 2012; Griffiths, 2013; O’Malley and Chamot, 1990) tend to locate LLSs in two domains, namely observable behaviours and mental processes. The term ‘activities’ mentioned by Griffiths (2013: 15) can be used to

include both ‘physical and mental behaviour’. However, the concern of Oxford’s (1989) definition is with the overt behaviours practised by the learners. Elsewhere, Oxford (2003: 81) treats LLSs as both behavioural and mental, by defining LLSs as specific plans or steps. Accordingly, some researchers adopting cognitivist approaches have attempted to address the interrelationship between observable behaviours and mental thoughts, by replacing the specific words ‘behaviours and thoughts’ with more general words such as ‘tools’ (Oxford et al. 2014, 11), ‘methods’ (Bialystok, 1978: 71) and approaches’ (O’Malley and Chamot, 1994: 7). However, the suggested solution leads to another problem in defining LLS which Macaro (2006) refers to; namely, whether LLSs are broad, general approaches to learning or specific actions or devices. We may see that ‘the Outside-Inside Problem’ in defining the concept of LLS would appear to be less critical from sociocultural perspectives that start, as Oxford and Schramm (2007: 48) indicate, from society rather than from an individual as the fundamental unit. As shown in the last two definitions in Table 2, the social interaction and classroom culture have a key role to play in the process of a learner’s strategy development.

(2) According to Macaro (2006: 322), the second problem of the construct of LLS, or what Schmeck (1988: 171) calls ‘the dimension of behavioural specificity-generality’, is also depicted by both Ellis (1994) and Gu (1996) by asking whether LLSs should be kept at a more flexible and general level, or need to be more specifically combined with other strategies in order to complete specific language tasks. Rubin (1975), for example, follows the less general perspective in the conception of LLS, while describing the LLSs used by GLLs. The less general perspective of LLSs, as described by Gu (2005: 4), sees LLSs as ‘skills’, ‘tactics’, or ‘techniques’. For Rubin (1975: 43), LLSs are specific techniques or devices that learners deploy to acquire knowledge, such as monitoring one’s own speech and making use of practice opportunities by seeking out native speakers or watching movies with

a view to developing cultural understanding. Hence, Rubin (1975: 43) affirms that LLSs are both ‘learnable and teachable forms’.

In response to Rubin’s (1975) description of specific LLSs used by GLLs, Stevick (1990: 144) postulates that some of these strategies such as ‘having a strong drive’ or ‘being a willing guesser’ cannot be regarded as techniques or devices. As a result, Stern (1975) adopts a general approach in his identification of the top-ten LLSs of GLLs, affirming that the term LLS has not been used in the same way by all LLS researchers. In view of this, Stern (1983) draws a distinction between ‘strategies’ and ‘techniques’. According to Stern (1983: 405), ‘strategies are ‘general tendencies or overall characteristics of the approach employed by a language learner’, e.g. having a positive attitude towards the target language, whereas ‘techniques’ are ‘particular forms of observable learning behaviour’ used by a learner, e.g. looking up words in a dictionary. Similarly, Goh (1998: 125) differentiates between strategies and tactics, stating that the former represent a general approach to learning, whereas the latter are observable specific actions. Griffiths (2013: 44) and Oxford (2011: 31) criticise this flexible and general perspective towards LLSs, in that the term LLS becomes similar to the concept of language learning styles. Echoing the problem of the specificity-generality of LLS, Takać (2008: 43) points out that the dichotomy between strategies and tactics/techniques was overcome by some researchers by using ‘the term individual LS to refer to the kind of behaviour Stern calls techniques’. In this respect, Cohen (2011) accentuates the potential of the element of choice as a fundamental criterion in discerning the strategic behaviour from other non-strategic processes. Indeed, this relates to Macaro’s (2006) third issue of LLS; namely, the level of consciousness required for using LLSs.

(3) The third problem of the term LLS discussed by Macaro (2006: 325) is how conscious and attentive to their language activities language learners should be in order to consider the activities as strategies. Krashen's (1976) Monitor Hypothesis, as Griffiths and Parr (2001: 348) argue, minimises the vital role of consciousness in language learning by suggesting that an intuitive mechanism is basically responsible for learners' language production and comprehension. Hence, Bialystok (1978: 71), as shown in Table 2, agrees that it is not necessary for language learners to be conscious of their choice of LLSs, especially in the strategies relevant to speaking or listening skills, in which a learner does not have sufficient time to monitor the correctness of utterances. Cohen (2007: 32) also admits that some LLS researchers (e.g. Bialystok, 1990; Faerch and Kasper, 1980) have stated that a strategy needs not necessarily be a conscious process, because less successful learners often use LLSs without paying attention to metacognitive skills.

In reviewing the literature on consciousness and attention, Dörnyei (2009: 132-35) suggests that consciousness is 'a notoriously vague term', and that attention actually entails 'a variety of mechanisms or subsystems, including alertness, orientation, detection, facilitation, and inhibition'. With this in mind, Cohen (2011: 11) declares that if a learning activity is automatically carried out by a learner without knowing its goal or significance, it should not be regarded as a 'strategy', because this activity cannot be described through a verbal report, and thus loses its salience as a strategy. Like Cohen (2011), Oxford (2011: 51) stresses that *'when the strategy has become automatic through extensive practice, it is no longer a strategy but has instead been transformed into...an unconscious habit'* (author's emphasis). As can be seen in Table 2, most LLS researchers (e.g. Oxford, 1989; Cohen, 2011; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990) believe that the consciousness element is essential in defining the concept of LLS.

(4) The fourth issue of LLS proposed by Macaro (2006: 324) is learners' motivation for using LLSs i.e. 'what learning strategies are for'. The definitions of LLS in Table 2 can reveal the differences between LLS researchers' perspectives about what motivates the use of LLSs. Guided by Anderson's (1985) cognitive information-processing theory based on the central idea of transforming declarative conscious knowledge into automatic procedural knowledge, Bialystok (1978), O'Malley and Chamot (1990), Oxford (1989) and Weinstein and Hume (1998) seem to hold the view that LLSs that activate mental processes can contribute greatly to fostering language learning, taking into account the intention of the learner (see Table 2). This idea is touched on by Weinstein and Mayer (1986: 315), who state that the use of LLSs can help learners select, acquire, organise and integrate new knowledge. Oxford's (1989) definition of LLS also suggests that learners' use of LLSs can have an affective purpose i.e. to increase enjoyment. Cohen (2012), in turn, appears to place greater emphasis on the role of LLSs in improving proficiency in learning and using a language and completing specific learning tasks, affirming that the learning goal should be formulated by learners themselves. According to Griffiths (2013: 15), the goal of using LLSs is to 'regulate' learners' language learning by exercising metacognitive or self-regulatory mechanisms, such as planning, monitoring and evaluation. In other words, Griffiths (2013) devotes more attention to the learner's knowledge constructs (strategic knowledge and general knowledge about L2 learning) and the regulatory process of L2 learning.

Consideration of the first six definitions of LLSs in Table 2 suggests that most LLS researchers (e.g. Anderson, 2005; Chamot, 2009; Cohen, 2012; Griffiths, 2013; Oxford et al., 2014, among others) adopt a cognitivist approach, which treats language learning as a set of mental process (e.g. perceiving, analysing, classifying, storing and retrieving) whereby learners deal with input and output (Gao, 2010a: 11). In this regard, their use of LLSs is primarily conceived as 'mental activities' directed towards success in language learning

and/or use (Gao, Liu and Zhu, 2013: 89). That is, the purpose of using LLSs from this stance is confined to linguistic objectives. However, Table 2 explains that the last two definitions of LLS are underpinned by sociocultural language learning perspectives, which underscore the impact of ‘mediation and socialization into a community of language learning practice’ (Donato and McCormick, 1994: 453). Therefore, language learners from a sociocultural standpoint are viewed as active agents, who are in active pursuit of both language-related competence and non-linguistic objectives basically related to learners’ identity formation (Benson and Cooker, 2013b; Norton, 2013). This point will be further discussed in Section 2.4.

The present longitudinal qualitative research, then, focuses not only on the participants’ cognitive and metacognitive processes but extends to acknowledgement of the societal, institutional and political contextual realities, as will be expounded later in this chapter. The phrases ‘strategy use’ and ‘strategic learning efforts’ were used interchangeably in this thesis. By having a comprehensive idea about the definitional issues of the term ‘learning strategy’, it seems both useful and necessary now to discuss the major contributions made by LLS research.

2.2.3 The Contribution of Language Learning Strategy Research

2.2.3.1 Development of Strategy Taxonomies and Inventories

In spite of the lack of consensus and aforementioned ‘considerable confusion’ in defining the term LLS (Griffiths and Oxford, 2014: 8), one of the outstanding contributions of LLS research is its move from a focus on the methods and products of language teaching to a concern with ‘explaining the variability in success among L2 learners, sought to describe the characteristics and practices of successful language learners in the hope of understanding

them and passing them on to less successful learners’ (Plonsky, 2011: 995). Gao (2010a: 12) points out that in order to establish relationships between language learners’ strategy use and their learning success, strategy researchers have developed various taxonomies and inventories of LLSs (e.g. Cohen, 2011; Dörnyei, 2005; O’Malley and Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990). This section mainly discusses three major strategy inventories (see Table 3).

Table 3: Three major strategy inventories and taxonomies

O'Malley and Chamot (1990): Three categories (26 items)	Oxford (1990): Six categories (50 items)		Dörnyei (2005): Four categories
Cognitive strategies	Direct strategies	Memory strategies	Cognitive strategies
Metacognitive strategies		Cognitive strategies	Metacognitive strategies
		Compensation strategies	
Socioaffective strategies	Indirect strategies	Metacognitive strategies	Affective strategies
		Affective strategies	
		Social strategies	Social strategies

Among the three strategy inventories discussed is O’Malley and Chamot’s (1990: 99) framework, which has 26 strategy items and three categories: cognitive, metacognitive and socioaffective strategies. According to O’Malley and Chamot (1990: 44), cognitive strategies ‘operate directly on incoming information, manipulating it in ways that enhance learning’. This category includes many strategies such as auditory representation (i.e. keeping a sound or sound sequence in the mind), elaboration (i.e. ‘relating new information to prior knowledge’), grouping (i.e. classification of words or concepts according to their meanings or attributes), imagery (i.e. the use of ‘visual images to understand and remember new

information'), making inferences, note-taking, resourcing (i.e. making use of language materials such as dictionaries.) and summarising (ibid).

Conversely, metacognitive strategies refer to 'higher order executive skills that may entail planning for, monitoring, or evaluating the success of a learning activity' (ibid). Examples of this category are strategies such as selective attention (i.e. paying attention to specific parts of the language input), self-management (i.e. arranging appropriate conditions for learning such as sitting in the front of the class), advance organisation (i.e. planning the learning activity in advance such as reviewing before going into class), self- monitoring (i.e. checking one's performance as one speaks), self-assessment (i.e. checking how well one is doing against one's own standards) and self-reinforcement (i.e. giving oneself rewards for success). Accordingly, language learners usually use metacognitive strategies to manage, direct, regulate and guide their learning. With regard to socioaffective strategies, they involve interaction with others or taking control of one's own feelings concerning language learning. This category in O'Malley and Chamot's (1990: 99) taxonomy comprises only three items: questioning for clarification, cooperation and self-talk.

Although O'Malley' and Chamot's (1990) taxonomy 'provided a theoretical background to much LLS research' (Grenfell and Macaro, 2007: 16), Dörnyei and Skehan (2003: 445) criticise this strategy inventory, due to its 'including diverse behaviours, such as cooperation, questioning and clarification, and self-talk within one class i.e. social/affective strategies'. Dörnyei (2005: 168) further declares that the nature of the third category of O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) classification system appears as 'a miscellaneous category...introduced simply to accommodate all strategies that did not fit into the first two types'. Likewise, Hsiao and Oxford (2002) suggest that the explanatory power of that taxonomy would increase if the category 'social/affective strategies' were divided into two separate categories i.e. 'social and

affective strategies'. Oxford (2011: 173) elsewhere proclaims that adopting Anderson's (1985) cognitive information-processing theory as the basis of O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) framework plays a key role in limiting the focus of the suggested framework to cognitive and metacognitive strategies. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) themselves acknowledge this matter, contending that:

Affective strategies are of less interest in an analysis such as ours which attempts to portray strategies in a cognitive theory. For the purposes of discussion, however, we present a classification scheme that includes the full range of strategies identified in the literature (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990: 44).

Recognising the weaknesses of the previous taxonomies of LLSs, Oxford (1990) produces her own classification of LLSs by drawing a distinction between direct and indirect strategies, which are further subdivided into six subcategories (memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social). The LLSs that directly involve learning the target language include memory, cognitive and compensation strategies. Memory strategies are used 'for remembering and retrieving information' such as imagery, repeatedly pronouncing or writing new words to remember them or making associations with what has already been learned (ibid: 37). Cognitive strategies, in turn, are often employed 'for understanding and producing the language' such as using English computer games, listening to radio/CDs in English and finding similarities between the first and target languages (ibid). Compared with memory strategies, the purpose of cognitive strategies is not simply memorisation, but instead deeper processing and use of the language (ibid: 38). Regarding compensation strategies, they are 'for using the language despite knowledge gaps' such as using gestures or body language (for speaking), making guesses based on the context (for listening and reading) and rephrasing (for speaking and writing) (ibid). Actually, Oxford's (1990) classification of direct

LLSs concurs with the cognitive and metacognitive strategies in O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) taxonomy.

Oxford's (1990: 11-12) indirect LLSs include metacognitive, social and affective strategies, which 'contribute indirectly but powerfully to learning'. In other words, the indirect strategies pertain to the management of the learning and regulating of thoughts and feelings. In effect, Oxford (1990) in her strategy taxonomy, breaks down O'Malley' and Chamot's (1990) socioaffective category into two categories, social and affective, and more strategies are included in these two categories. In her taxonomy, affective strategies include learners' recognition of their feelings and learning circumstances, such as taking risks and trying to relax when feeling anxious about learning, whereas social strategies deal with the people surrounding the learner and the environment as well such as asking someone to speak slowly, and learning about social or cultural norms. Oxford (2001: 167) elsewhere affirms that the boundaries between the six categories of her taxonomy might be 'fuzzy' because learners sometimes deploy more than one strategy simultaneously. For example, the metacognitive strategy of planning requires reasoning which might also be considered to be a cognitive strategy.

Reviewing different classification systems of LLSs, Hsiao and Oxford (2002: 372) argue that Oxford's (1990) classification of LLSs is 'the most comprehensive, detailed and systematic taxonomy of strategies' because that classification involves 'the whole learner' through taking into account learners' affective and social sides rather than just focusing on their mental capabilities. To support her point, Oxford (2011: 159) elsewhere mentions that her strategy inventory is based on complementary learning theories, including Anderson's (1985) cognitive information-processing theory, Flavell's (1978) metacognitive strategies and Bailey's (1983) and Gardner's (1985) theories of language motivation, anxiety, and affective

aspects. Notably, Oxford's (1990) strategy classification is used as the basis for constructing 'the most widely used instrument in language learner strategy research', termed Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) (Yesilbursa and Ipek, 2013: 888).

Oxford's (1990) SILL is a structured self-report questionnaire, which is designed to measure learners' reported frequency of use of LLSs, rather than 'a specific portrayal of the strategies used by the learner on a particular language task' (Oxford, 1999: 114). SILL has two basic versions: one for learners of English as a second or foreign language (50 items) and one for speakers of English learning other target languages (80 items). Furthermore, the SILL uses a choice of five Likert-scale responses for each strategy item, ranging from 'never or almost never true of me' to 'always or almost true of me' (ibid). An example of a SILL item is 'I try to find patterns in the language'. Oxford (2011: 160) indicates that approximately 10,000 learners around the world have used the SILL, which was translated into many languages such as Arabic, Chinese, German, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, among many others. Much LLS research has been conducted under Oxford's (1990) theoretical framework in both English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) environments, including the LLS studies conducted in the Middle East (e.g. Abu-Radwan, 2011; El-Dib, 2004; Griffiths, 2003, 2006; Nyikos and Oxford, 1993; Oxford and Burry-Stock, 1995; Wong and Nunan, 2011). However, some strategy researchers (e.g. Gao, 2004; LoCastro, 1994; Rose, 2012; Woodrow, 2005; Wray and Hajar, 2014) consider SILL as 'context-insensitive'. The issue related to the criticism of SILL will be further explained in Section 2.3.1.

According to Dörnyei (2005), two essential problems of Oxford's (1990) sixfold classification of LLSs exist. The first of these is that it contains compensation strategies which are related to language use rather than language learning, and the two processes (i.e.

language learning and language use) ‘are so different in terms of their function and their psycholinguistic representation that they are best kept separate’. The second problem has to do with the separation of cognitive strategies and memory strategies, because the latter should be regarded as ‘a subclass of cognitive strategies’ as proved by Purpura’s (1999) empirical study (Dörnyei, 2005: 168). This separation, as Gu (1996: 18) notes, brings with it ‘more confusion than illumination’. Consequently, Dörnyei (2005: 169) suggests a four-component classification of LLSs (cognitive, metacognitive, social and affective strategies) by excluding compensation strategies from the scope of LLSs.

Dörnyei’s (2005: 169) four main components of LLS classification are 1) cognitive strategies, including ‘the manipulation and transformation of the learning materials’ (e.g. repetition, using imaging); 2) metacognitive strategies, involving higher-order strategies aimed at analysing, monitoring, evaluating and organising one’s own learning process; 3) social strategies, involving interpersonal behaviours aimed at increasing the amount of L2 communication (e.g. initiating interaction with native speakers, cooperating with peers) and 4) affective strategies, involving control of the emotional conditions and experiences. Although Oxford (1990: 17) agrees that LLS ‘classification conflicts are inevitable’, Oxford (2011: 90-91) believes that excluding compensation strategies from LLS classification seems to be inappropriate, given that it might be difficult to separate language learning from language use because learning can only be accomplished through use, such as through meaningful communication.

In summary, this section has reviewed the development of LLS classification systems, which noticeably provide insights into the rich repertoire of potential LLSs. Faced with controversy regarding the strategy classification into neat and universally-agreed categories as discussed above, the current study intends to follow Griffiths’ (2013: 44-45) advice by reporting the

patterns of strategy use displayed in the data in accordance with ‘the particular learners, situations and goals involved and the purpose for which the research is being carried out’. More precisely, the classification of my Arab university participants’ strategy use across different settings is based on ‘*post hoc* thematic analyses’ (i.e. is dependent on the participants’ experiential accounts) rather than any pre-existing classification system (Griffiths and Oxford, 2014: 3, authors’ emphasis).

2.2.3.2 Research on Factors Affecting Language Strategy Choice and Use

Another fundamental contribution made by LLS research, as Gao (2010a: 15) mentions, is that ‘a much more sophisticated understanding of individual differences’ in language learning has been produced through examining the correlation between learners’ strategy use and other variables such as motivation, learning style, gender, language aptitude and learner beliefs. According to Wong and Nunan (2011: 147), interest in learners’ variation in strategy use has come to light as a result of critiques of the idea that there is one universal set of the GLL, as discussed in Section 2.2.1. Individual differences (IDs), as Dörnyei (2006: 42) defines them, refer to ‘dimensions of enduring personal characteristics that are assumed to apply to everybody and on which people differ by degree’. ID research focuses on exploring the relationship between individual difference factors and what Larsen-Freeman (2001: 21) calls ‘differential success’ in second language learning. This notion is expressed clearly by Ellis (2004), who states that

In the case of L1 acquisition, [all] children ... achieve full competence in their mother tongue; in the case of L2 acquisition (SLA), learners vary not only in the speed of acquisition but also in their ultimate level of achievement, with a few achieving

native-like competence and others stopping far short. How can we explain these differences in achievement? (Ellis, 2004: 525)

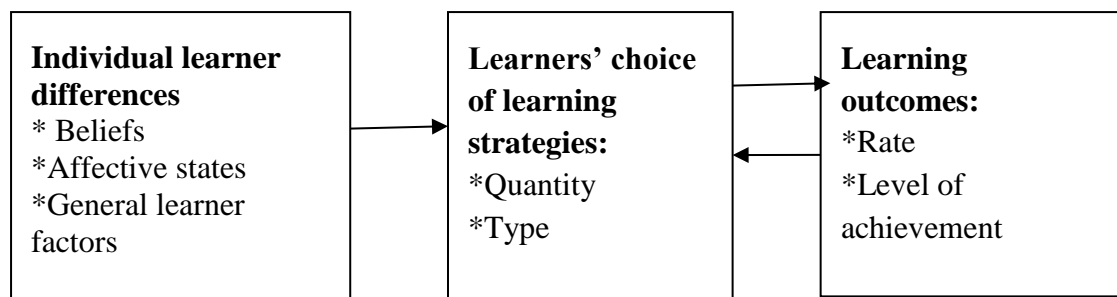
As Takać (2008: 28) points out, language learning researchers have labelled and classified IDs differently. Benson and Gao (2008: 26), for example, differentiate between two main categories of individual difference variables:

- Innate attributes are those which language learners have little control over, such as gender, age, learning aptitude, personality and learning style.
- Acquired attributes are those which language learners ‘can effect changes to through conscious and deliberate effort’ such as motivations, attitudes, beliefs and strategy use.

Dörnyei (2005: 162) expresses his doubts over the issue of seeing strategy use as an individual difference variable, considering it as ‘an aspect of the learning process rather than being a learner attribute proper’. In response to this claim, Benson and Gao (2008: 26) report that questionnaires are heavily used in LLS research to identify learners’ strategy preferences rather than their actual and shifting use of LLSs. Accordingly, strategy preferences are a psychological attribute similar to learner beliefs.

Ellis (1994: 540) in turn distinguishes three sets of individual learner differences. The first entails beliefs about language learning, affective states (e.g. L2 anxiety, presence or lack of self-confidence) and some general factors (e.g. age, learning style, language aptitude, motivation). The second set comprises various learning strategies that learners deploy in language learning, whereas the third set includes language learning outcomes in terms of proficiency, achievement and rate of acquisition. The three sets of variables interact in complex ways, as is shown in the following figure:

Figure 1 Adapted from Ellis' (1994: 530) diagram of the relationship between individual learning differences, learning strategies and learning outcomes



The above figure shows how LLSs from cognitivist perspectives have been regarded as a fundamental variable outcome of individual differences. In addressing this point, Benson and Gao (2008: 27) argue that much of LLS research has been devoted to examining the interaction between LLSs and other individual differences, on the grounds that LLSs are ‘malleable’ and have ‘a positive link with language proficiency’ (i.e. the advanced learners use more LLSs), using strategy questionnaires such as Oxford’s (1990) SILL. Ellis (2004: 545) believes that survey studies in LLS research allow ‘a systematic investigation of the various factors that influence strategy use’ such as learning style, proficiency level and gender.

Since postgraduate learners of English from an Arab background are involved in the current research, almost all previous LLS published studies on strategy use among Arabic-speaking students learning English (e.g. Ababneh, 2013; Al-Harthi, 2005; Al-Zubaidi, 2012; Abu-Radwan, 2011; El-Dib, 2004; Kaylani, 1996; Khalil, 2005; Salem, 2006) have been based on cognitivist approaches, and conducted quantitatively, using strategy survey tools to describe their participants’ strategy use and to correlate it with other individual learner variables, especially language proficiency, gender and motivation variables.

In one of the most frequently-cited studies in the field of LLS research, El-Dib (2004) adopted a cognitivist framework, in order to understand the relationship between the strategy use of her 504 Kuwaiti college students studying English for specific purposes and both language proficiency and gender variables, using Oxford's (1990) SILL. El-Dib (2004) found that her male participants used more social and metacognitive strategies (e.g. 'I look for people I can talk to in English' and 'I ask questions in English', 'I start conversations in English') than the females although many previous studies in non-Arab contexts (e.g. Lan and Oxford, 2003; Watanabe, 1990) showed the opposite. Her study also demonstrated that female participants favoured using cognitive, memorisation and affective strategies (e.g. 'I write down my feelings in a language dairy', 'I use rhymes to remember new English words', 'I try to find patterns in English').

Commenting on these findings, El-Dib (2004) mentions that Kuwait, like most Arab countries, is a conservative country and thus females do not usually have adequate opportunities to socialise with speakers of English outside the classroom setting. In contrast, Kuwaiti males have more freedom in terms of travelling, socialising and going to the movies, and this enables them to use many social and metacognitive strategies. Another finding of El-Dib's (2004) study was that the less proficient learners deployed many affective strategies to reduce the passive effects of anxiety and to develop their self-confidence and self-efficacy. El-Dib (2004: 93) concluded by affirming the importance of adopting qualitative methods in further LLS studies, given that 'using questionnaires reflects an approach to investigating strategy use that is separate from context'.

Another quantitative study was conducted by Abu-Radwan (2011) on 128 Omani learners, 39 of them were males and 89 were females, majoring in English at Sultan Qaboos University in the Arab Gulf state of Oman. All learners had at a minimum of 8 years exposure to English,

and their age ranged between 18 and 23. Like El-Dib (2004), Abu-Radwan's (2011: 115) study adopted a cognitivist standpoint, and aimed at unearthing the relationship between the LLSs used by his participants and a number of individual learner variables, including gender and English proficiency, measured by 'students' grade point average (GPA) in English courses, study duration in the English Department, and students' perceived self-rating'. To this end, he used the English version of Oxford's (1990) SILL with a translation of some difficult words into Arabic. Abu-Radwan's (2011: 138) study revealed that memory strategies were the least favoured strategies although the educational systems in most Arab countries, as Abu-Radwan claimed, are based on rote memorisation. Abu-Radwan (2011: 138) ascribed this finding to the fact that most Arab learners of English feel the need to depart from 'the conventional didactic strategies to more communicatively oriented strategies'. His participants also showed a preference for using metacognitive strategies (e.g. planning, monitoring and evaluating language use).

The findings in Abu-Radwan's (2011: 139) study related to the gender variable were congruent with that in El-Dib (2004), showing that the male participants used more social strategies than the females as a result of the conservative nature of Omani tribal society which prevents females from 'establishing relationships outside the immediate circles'. Furthermore, the study reported that the more proficient learners employed more cognitive, metacognitive and affective strategies than their less proficient counterparts, who were less aware of their language needs. Abu-Radwan (2011: 146) concluded by acknowledging that the complete reliance on Oxford's SILL to collect his data was one of the weaknesses of his study, because learners 'may not remember the strategies they have used in the past, may claim to use strategies that in fact they do not use, or may not understand the strategy descriptions in the questionnaire items'.

Guided by a cognitivist viewpoint, Salem (2006) carried out a quantitative study of 147 undergraduate Lebanese learners of English, 82 of them males and 65 females, enrolled in intensive EFL classes at the American University of Beirut in Lebanon. The aim of the study was to unfold the correlation between her participants' LLS use and both motivation and gender variables, using Oxford's (1990) SILL. According to Salem (2006: 67), the cognitive and metacognitive strategies were ranked as the most frequently used strategies which indicated that the participants paid particular attention to 'practicing, using words in different ways...learning from English mistakes, having clear goals for improving and thinking about self-progress'. However, the least used LLSs were the affective and social strategies.

Unlike the findings of El-Dib' (2004) and Abu-Radwan's (2011) studies, Salem's (2006) study showed no significant gender differences in terms of the motivational orientations and the overall strategy use of her participants. Salem (2006), like many other LLS researchers, called for further LLS action research on Arab learners of English, highlighting the importance of combining both quantitative and qualitative methods for data collection rather than using only the survey methods. With this in mind, the present research may be seen as the first longitudinal qualitative study to have explored in depth the strategic language learning efforts of postgraduate Arab learners of English while studying abroad in the UK.

2.3 Central Weaknesses of Language Learning Strategy Research and Solutions

The previous section has reviewed the major contributions made by research using the LLS framework through imparting insights into the rich repertoire of potential LLSs and producing a complex picture of individual differences in learners' strategy use. However, LLS studies underpinned by cognitivist perspectives have weaknesses, as will be explained in Section 2.3.1. In addition to the weaknesses of LLS research, this section sheds light on the

controversy between the proponents and opponents of LLS research in relation to the proposal for using the construct of ‘self-regulation’ in place of ‘LLS’.

2.3.1 Major Criticisms of Cognitivist Language Learning Strategy Research

Some researchers who utilise a LLS framework (e.g. Dörnyei, 2005, 2006; Ellis, 1994; Macaro, 2006; Tseng et al., 2006) suggest that research into LLSs has principally suffered from two main weaknesses, which stem from the different conceptualisations of the term LLS and the methodological approaches usually followed in LLS research. The weaknesses identified by these researchers have, indeed, played a pivotal role in the decline in significance of the LLS theoretical base (Gu, 2012: 330). As already described in Section 2.2.2, some strategy researchers (e.g. Cohen, 2012; Griffiths, 2013; Griffiths and Oxford, 2014; Weinstein and Hume, 1998) have not come to a consensus about what LLSs actually are. Macaro (2006: 322-326), for instance, ascribes the theoretical inconsistencies and conceptual ambiguities concerning the construct of LLS to four major problems, which were already expounded in Section 2.2.2. These four central problems may be summarised as follows:

- (1) LLSs should be regarded as either unobservable mental operations or observable behaviour or both. The discussion in Section 2.2.2 gave primacy to the belief that LLSs can be both behavioural and mental.
- (2) LLSs should be kept at a more flexible and general level, or need to be specifically combined with other strategies for completing specific language tasks. This problem, in turn, has led to overlaps in the different terms used to describe the construct of LLS such as tactics, behaviours, thoughts and techniques.

- (3) LLSs need to involve consciousness or awareness on the part of the learner or can be unconsciously performed. The discussion in Section 2.2.2 was in favour of considering LLSs as intentional and deliberate activities, because ‘the element of *choice*... is what gives a strategy its special character’ (Cohen, 2011: 7, author’s italics).
- (4) LLS researchers vary greatly in their opinions as to what motivates the use of LLSs. Although the majority of strategy researchers (e.g. Chamot, 2005; Cohen, 2011; Oxford, 2011, among many others) limit the purpose of using LLSs to linguistic objectives, the current research aims to emphasise the potential of LLSs for both linguistic and non-linguistic goals i.e. how to gain access to the desired learning community. This point will be revisited in Section 2.4.

The development of strategy taxonomies described in Section 2.2.3.1 has contributed, as Oxford (2011: 160) argues, to the increasing use of survey methods in the LLS research community. According to White et al. (2007: 95), Oxford’s (1990) SILL is ‘without doubt the most widely used instrument in language learner strategy research’ (see Section 2.2.3.1 for more details about SILL). As repeatedly mentioned, all previous LLS empirical published studies on strategy use among Arabic-speaking students learning English (e.g., Ababneh, 2013; Aljuaid, 2010; El-Dib, 2004; Kayali, 1996; Khalil, 2005; Salem, 2006) are based on the cognitivist framework and conducted quantitatively, using strategy survey tools (especially Oxford’s SILL). However, the quantitative paradigm used in a substantial body of LLS research has been criticised by socially oriented researchers (e.g. Gao, 2004; LoCastro, 1994; Rose, 2012; Woodrow, 2005). Three major criticisms have been outlined by these researchers:

- (1) Strategy questionnaires tend to minimise the impact of contextual variations on language learners’ strategy use by attempting to use a particular strategy questionnaire in different

sociocultural settings. According to Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995: 6), the purpose of using specific survey methods in different pedagogic contexts is to help strategy researchers compare the relevant findings of different studies. However, LoCastro (1995) challenges Oxford' and Burry-Stock's (1995) claim that SILL fits all sociocultural settings. To support her claim, LoCastro reported the contradictory results that she gained from the empirical study she conducted in 1994. For example, according to LoCastro (1994), Oxford's (1990) SILL lacked contextualisation, because the most frequent LLSs deployed by her Japanese university participants of English were memory strategies, although SILL implied that these strategies were likely to be rarely used by all language learners.

Additionally, language learners might encounter some difficulty in understanding or interpreting accurately the strategy description in each item of the written questionnaires (Bremner, 1998: 494). For example, some items in Oxford's (1990) SILL might not be clear to some Arab learners of English where English is taught as a foreign language in their homelands, such as 'acting out a new word or using flash cards'. Another example is that learners may become confused when responding to the following item in Oxford's (1990) SILL 'I pay attention when someone is speaking English' simply because learners might be unable to decide who is 'someone'. As a result, supporting the validity of general strategy questionnaires used to measure learners' strategy use might be unreasonable simply because the survey tools do not appear to be applied equally well to all learners with different educational and social backgrounds. In response to this criticism, Oxford (2011: 162) encourages strategy researchers to adapt items of questionnaires to suit their local research contexts, by leaving a space for the participants to write down additional strategies. She adds that the empirical study conducted by Lee and Oxford (2008) might be regarded as a good example of using additional, open-ended questions, along with Oxford's (1990) SILL in order to provide in-depth, qualitative data.

(2) Another notable potential flaw in the use of strategy questionnaires in LLS research lies in the difficulty of ascertaining if strategy questionnaires ‘measure what they purport to measure’ and ‘do so consistently’ (Ellis, 2004: 527). As Jiang and Cohen (2012: 33) state, most strategy questionnaires focus primarily on the frequency of learners’ strategy use, rather than on the quality or effectiveness of their use through inviting language learners to respond to a frequency scale, ranging from ‘never or almost never’ to ‘always or almost always’. Dörnyei (2005: 182) further argues that strategy questionnaires may appear to be psychologically flawed and not ‘cumulative’. This is because of the potential presence of a non-linear relationship between individual item scores and total scale scores. For instance, a learner may not be a good memory strategy user in general while nevertheless scoring highly on some items in the memory scale (e.g. using rhymes or a combination of images and sounds to remember a new word). Like Dörnyei (2005), Ehrman et al. (2003) recognise that using several strategies is not necessarily an indicator of an able strategy user, because some advanced learners may use very few learning strategies to perform a specific task.

Echoing this point, Yamamori et al. (2003: 384) state that ‘low reported strategy use is not always a sign of ineffective learning. Moreover, reportedly high-frequency use of strategies does not guarantee that the learning is successful’. For example, one of the findings of Hong-Nam’ and Leavell’s (2006) quantitative study on fifty-three English as a second language (ESL) learners from different cultural backgrounds enrolled in an intensive college English programme was a curvilinear relationship between these participants’ strategy use and their language performance as measured by Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) scores, because the participants at the intermediate level reported more use of LLSs than those at the beginning or advanced levels. Likewise, the findings of Phillips’ (1991) study with 141 ESL learners at American universities reported a non-linear relationship between ESL learners’ use of strategies and their language proficiency, as measured by TOEFL

scores. Therefore, Oxford (2011: 160) acknowledges that it might be preferable to conduct interviews with advanced learners, rather than responding to a questionnaire because such learners can ‘automatize many of their cognitive or metacognitive strategies, creating unconscious habits’. Gao (2004: 8-9) also indicates that modifying a questionnaire to fit local research contexts should be triangulated with other qualitative research methods such as interviews or observations, in order to capture most aspects and dimensions of language learning behaviours used by a learner.

(3) Strategy questionnaires also create the impression that language learners’ strategy use is a static ‘variable’ by focusing on the frequency and expressed preferences of learners’ strategy use, rather than on the dynamic and fluid nature of their strategy use and development across time and space (Rose, 2012: 139-140). As a result, Ellis (2004: 527) assumes that learners might be incapable of responding appropriately to the item ‘I ask questions in English’ simply because strategic learning behaviours adopted by a learner vary ‘dynamically according to context’. Notably, language learners may claim to use strategies they do not actually employ, since the processes of learning, as both Grenfell and Harris (1999: 54) note, lie within the ‘black box’ of the brain.

Based on the aforementioned discussion, the over-dependence on strategy questionnaires in LLS studies has encouraged some researchers to utilise socially oriented theoretical approaches (e.g. Atkinson, 2011; Benson and Gao, 2008; Coyle, 2007; Gao, 2013a; Norton and Toohey, 2001) to express their suspicions over the findings of the studies that correlated learners’ strategy use with other factors such as motivation, learning style or learning beliefs. Their claim was based on the assumption that these studies replicated a decontextualised, unchanging and incomplete picture of language learners’ strategic learning behaviours, through examining merely language learners’ frequency of strategy use, and underestimating

the importance of both contextual variations and task influence. This has lent support to the advent of sociocultural approaches as a useful lens through which to capture the dynamic and complex nature of LLS, using qualitative methods (this point related to ‘social turn’ in language education will be further explained in Section 2.4). Based on this, the present study was conducted qualitatively, using semi-structured interviews as the main research method in order to unearth a group of Arab university learners’ changing use of LLSs, including their underlying motivations and learning beliefs.

2.3.2 A Proposal for Moving away from Language Learning Strategy Research

The aforementioned weaknesses related to the field of LLSs have encouraged some language learning researchers (e.g. Dörnyei and Skehan, 2003; Dörnyei, 2005; Ortega, 2009; Tseng et al, 2006) to adopt a ‘sceptical and dismissive’ position concerning the potential of pursuing LLS research (Grenfell and Macaro, 2007: 25). For example, Dörnyei and Skehan (2003: 610) uphold the view of abandoning the construct of LLS altogether in research studies. They go further to recommend adopting a ‘more versatile’ concept of self-regulation’, which represents ‘the degree to which individuals are active participants in their own learning’ (ibid, 611). The notion of ‘self-regulation’ for the detractors of LLS research (e.g., Dörnyei, 2005; Ortega 2009; Tseng et al 2006) is a more dynamic concept than that which underpins LLS because it explains learners’ strategic efforts in managing their personal learning processes, especially how to plan, monitor, focus on and evaluate their own learning. Accordingly, language learners’ self-regulatory capacity and their cognitive processes may be captured.

In an insightful scrutiny of LLS research, Phakiti (2003: 680) points out that much of LLS research espouses cognitivist approaches that depict the trait aspect of language learners' strategy use using strategy questionnaires. An example of this is Oxford's (1990) SILL. LLS as a trait represents a decontextualised and fixed picture of learners' strategy use across occasions (Hong and O'Neil, 2001: 187). Therefore, Tseng et al. (2006: 82) question the viability of most LLS studies, which have related learners' strategy use 'to an underlying *trait* because items ask respondents to generalize their actions across situations rather than referencing singular and specific learning events' (author's italics). Tseng et al. (2006: 81) affirm that there should be 'a shift from focusing on the product-the actual techniques employed- to the self-regulatory process itself and the specific learner capacity underlying it'. In line with this, Ortega (2009: 2011) encourages researchers to take up the self-regulatory approach as a theoretical framework in order to understand language learners' '*creative and conscious* efforts' employed to control their own learning processes rather than to focus on sheer frequency of learners' strategy use, which dominates the bulk of LLS research (author's italics).

In a trenchant critique of LLS research, Dörnyei (2009: 183) is unequivocally pessimistic, seeing learners' activities as 'idiosyncratic self-regulated behaviour, and a particular learning behaviour can be strategic for one learner and non-strategic for another'. For example, some learning activities such as repetition, note-taking and rote memorisation might appear to be strategic for a learner whose main goal is to pass the exam, but these activities are arguably less useful to another learner whose central aim is to communicate with native speakers of the target language. Accordingly, an activity can be strategic when it particularly addresses the individual learner's learning purposes in a specific learning setting, and this in turn may disqualify the use of strategy questionnaires which are basically designed to describe learners' strategy use in a general way (see Section 2.3.1 for more details about this point).

Bearing the major difficulties of LLS research in mind, Dörnyei (2005: 191) has questioned whether LLSs actually exist as a psychological construct, and hence, he suggests using the term ‘self-regulation’ instead. Related to this, Dörnyei (2006: 59) strongly values the ‘learner self-management (LSM)’ model proposed by Joan Rubin (2005), a leading LLS expert, because such a model can prompt language learning researchers to shift their focus from ‘the *product* (strategies) to the *process* (self-regulation)’. The construct of LSM, as indicated by both Chamot (2005: 125) and Oxford (2011: 7), seems to parallel the notion of ‘self-regulation’ established in educational psychology.

According to Rubin (2005: 37), LSM concerns itself with ‘the ability to deploy [metacognitive strategic] *procedures* and to access *knowledge and beliefs* in order to accomplish learning goals in a dynamically changing environment’ (author’s italics). The former refers to five procedures, namely ‘planning, monitoring, evaluating, problem identification/solving and implementing’ (ibid). Conversely, the latter, knowledge and beliefs, includes five components: ‘task knowledge, self-knowledge, beliefs, background knowledge, and strategy knowledge’ (ibid: 41) (for more explanation about LSM, refer to Appendix 2). Dörnyei (2006: 59) regards Rubin’s (2005) LSM model as ‘a major extension of the traditional conceptualisation of L2 strategic learning’ and encourages other LLS experts to embrace Rubin’s ideas in their empirical studies. In other words, this model might appear to portray Rubin’s changing focus from identifying the characteristics of a GLL (i.e. focus on the outcome) to LSM (i.e. focus on the process), which fundamentally underscores the potential of metacognition as a prerequisite to language learners’ self-regulation. Notably, although Dörnyei (2005, 2006) criticises the theoretical and methodological issues surrounding the construct of LLS, he acknowledges the value of teaching strategies, as shown clearly in the following statement:

...even if the notion of *learning strategy* does not exist as a distinctive aspect of learning but only indicates creative and personalized learning behaviours, the training of these ‘strategies’ would be a highly desirable activity as it would amount, in effect, to the teaching of learners ways in which they can learn better (Dörnyei, 2005: 173, author’s emphasis).

2.3.3 A response to Calls for Moving away from Language Learning Strategy Research

Some researchers have challenged the vigorous attempts made by some opponents of LLS research (e.g. Dörnyei, 2005, 2009; Ortega, 2009; Tseng et al, 2006) to move to abandon the construct of LLS in research studies through exploring learners’ strategic learning in accordance with their self-regulatory capacity (e.g. Cohen, 2011, Gao, 2007a; Gu, 2012; Kemp, 2007; Rose, 2012). Gao (2007a) in an illuminating paper, for example, critically addresses Tseng et al.’s (2006) proposal to replace the construct of LLS with the notion of self-regulation by questioning whether the marginalisation of LLS research is a prerequisite for introducing self-regulation into research on learners’ strategic learning. As described in the previous section, Tseng et al. (2006) suggest that LLS research has run its course because most LLS studies have focused on describing learners’ strategy use, rather than on capturing the processes underlying them. Tseng et al. (2006: 81) also call on language learning researchers to examine ‘the self-regulatory process itself and the specific learner capacity underlying it’ (i.e. focus on the process).

Gao (2007a: 616) agrees with Tseng et al.’s (2006) view that a myriad of LLS research studies have been apparently depicting the trait aspect of learners’ strategy use through relying greatly on task-free strategy questionnaires, which address language learners’ strategy preferences independently of the situation or task at hand. Nonetheless, Gao (2007a: 616-617) points to the two facets of language learners’ strategy operation, namely LLS as a *trait*

and LLS as a *state* (my emphasis). The former, as already stated, symbolises learners' general tendency to use certain kinds of LLSs 'free from a particular context' (Phakiti, 2006: 26), whereas states of learners' strategy use signify 'their actual deployment of strategies in different learning settings or contexts' (Gao, 2007a: 616). In this sense, LLS as a state can capture the dynamism of learners' actual use of LLSs, according to particular situations or tasks.

Gao (2007a: 619) concludes his paper by affirming that the emergence of self-regulation does not necessarily entail that LLS research comes to an end because Tseng et al. (2006: 81) themselves acknowledge the fact that LLS is regarded as an important construct in language learners' self-regulated learning. As Cohen (2011: 377) aptly puts it, the movement towards using the term 'self-regulation' in place of the construct of LLS may leave an important question unanswered; namely, 'What learners do to self-regulate. The answer is that they use strategies'. Therefore, Gao (2007a: 619) recommends that language learning researchers embrace sociocultural approaches while investigating their learners' strategy use, on the grounds that using qualitative or multi-method approaches underpinned by sociocultural language learning perspectives can disclose the ongoing interplay between learners' actual strategy use and its underlying processes in specific contexts. This clearly appears in the explanation of sociocultural LLS studies in Section 2.5.2.

In response to the critiques of LLS research, Cohen (2011) would agree that the concept of LLS is valid both theoretically and practically by referring to major developments in LLS research. Like Gao (2007a), Cohen (2011: 377) indicates that one of the essential developments in the LLS field is shifting the focus from the notion of quantity to that of quality through adopting a more qualitative and context-sensitive approach, which sees learners' strategy use as 'dynamic and varying across contexts'. For example, the analysis of

the experiential narratives of a group of Chinese learners of English in Gao's qualitative (2006a) study found that his participants' LLS use resonated with their shifting contextual needs. That is, these participants deployed repetition, note-taking and rote memorisation strategies in their Chinese learning context because these strategies helped them pass the exam and address both their teachers' recommendations and their cultural beliefs implying that 'a person can memorize a word if s/he repeats exposure to it [particularly visually] seven times' (ibid: 63). However, the intensity of the strategies applied by the participants in China decreased when they moved to the UK because of the changes in the assessment modes from 'authoritative' standard exams followed in China into 'coursework assessment' through the medium of English in the UK (ibid). Related to this, the instrumental value of learning English merely for passing an exam decreased for these participants after their arrival in the UK. Based on this, a more qualitative and contextualised approach in investigating learners' LLS use can be favoured in LLS research.

Concerning the definitional issues of LLS, Rose (2012: 1) notes that the use of learner self-regulation instead of the construct of LLS 'might be a matter of throwing the baby out with the bathwater', given that the term 'self-regulation', in marked similarity to the term LLS, suffers from 'definitional fuzziness'. More specifically, the construct of 'self-regulation' has been used more or less synonymously with different technical terms such as 'self-management' (Rubin 2005, 2013); 'autonomy' (Oxford, 2011) and 'self-direction' (Pemberton and Cooker, 2012). Gu (2012: 330) follows a similar line of reasoning to those of Gao (2007a) and Rose (2012), arguing that attempts to replace the term LLS with self-regulation are 'not a healthy sign'. To support his point, Gu (2012: 331) pinpoints that

...conceptual fuzziness should not be a problem serious enough to overthrow forty years of research on language learning strategies. The argument is clear and straightforward: if not being able to agree on the definition of a Planet until 2006 does

not in any way discredit the scientific nature of astronomy, or necessitate the removal of the concept of “planet” altogether, why should we throw away a whole line of research on language learning strategies? In fact, the proposed alternative term “self-regulation” or even a more general and key term “learning” fall into the same fuzziness trap (Gu, 2012: 331).

2.3.4 Summary

The discussion thus far in this chapter seems to confirm the fact that cognitive psychology theories dominate the bulk of LLS research, as attested to by the definitions of LLS in the field. Moreover, a great many LLS empirical studies have used survey methods to investigate the trait and static aspect of learners’ strategy use. To the best of my knowledge, almost all published LLS empirical studies on Arab learners’ strategy use while learning English (e.g. Abu-Radwan, 2011; El-Dib, 2004; Fields, 2011; Kaylani, 1996; among many others), described in Section 2.2.3.2, have been based upon cognitivist approaches and relied greatly on Oxford’s (1990) SILL. In this review of LLS research, a number of major contributions made by LLS researchers and some central criticisms in the field of LLSs have also been outlined. The review has further revealed the potential for investigating the dynamic and actual use of learners’ strategy use mediated by different contextual conditions. This investigation, in turn, replicates the shifting paradigms in language learning research more generally (see Table 4 in Section 2.4).

At this point, it seems fruitful to present a general picture of the ‘the social turn’ in language learning research that departs from the dominance of cognitive norms and assumptions (for a comprehensive review, see Atkinson, 2011; Benson and Cooker, 2013b; Block, 2003; Murray, 2014). The ‘social turn’ in language learning research has played a key role in

promoting some LLS researchers to explore learners' strategic language learning efforts from sociocultural language learning perspectives, as will be discussed in the coming sections.

2.4 The 'Social Turn' in Language Learning Research Landscape

The dominant cognitive theories of language learning, largely based on the theory of human information processing, tend to regard language learning as 'a mental process that... resides mostly, if not solely in the mind' (Davis, 1995: 427-428). According to Atkinson (2011: 4), cognition is information processing, or in Oxford's words (2011: 46) a 'faculty of knowing' that basically undergoes a mechanical set of operations. This set of operations comprises encountering new information where the knowledge is mainly static and conscious, processing that information through practising it and associating it with what is already in the mind to '*strengthen and expand the schemata*' (i.e. the existing information), and finally producing output automatically (Oxford, 2011: 48-49 , author's emphasis). That is, the main aim of cognitive information-processing, as already explained in Section 2.2.3, is to transform '(conscious, effortful) declarative knowledge to '(unconscious, automatic) procedural knowledge' (ibid: 47). To remember a new item of English vocabulary, for instance, a learner might associate it with other known words that have similar or exactly the same pronunciation, such as 'to, too, two' and 'there, their, they're'. At first this process takes effort and thought (declarative knowledge), but it may become automatic through practice. In effect, many researchers support Macaro's (2001: 264) conclusion, namely that '[O]ne thing seems to be increasingly clear and that is that, across learning contexts, those learners who are pro-active in their pursuit of language learning appear to learn best'.

With the so-called ‘social turn’ in education (Block, 2003; Zuengler and Miller, 2006), the landscape of language learning research has challenged the ascendancy of cognitive learning theories, by arguing that language learning cannot be seen as just the by-product of ‘an individualistic mental process’ (Morita, 2012: 26). Bearing this in mind, Ortega (2011: 168) emphasises the focal role of the social, cultural, historical, and political-economic situations to which a language learner belongs in mediating their cognitive and metacognitive mechanisms, such as perceiving, analysing or classifying. In this sense, some researchers endorsing socially oriented theoretical perspectives (e.g. Atkinson, 2011; Gao, 2010a; Lantolf and Pavlenko, 2001; Watson-Gegeo, 2004; Wenger, 1998) have attempted to bridge the gap between social and cognitive approaches. According to these researchers, language learning does not take place in a sociocultural vacuum, but is a social process in which culturally and historically situated individuals are in active pursuit of both linguistic and non-linguistic objectives basically related to identity formation.

Norton (2000: 5) defines ‘identity’ as ‘how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how the relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future’. In this view, a language learner from a sociocultural stance constantly negotiates their sense of self in relation to their larger social world, and can hold ‘multiple identities’ such as ‘a student’, ‘an actor’, ‘a university lecturer’...etc. (Benson and Cooker, 2013a: 6; see also Dörnyei and Kubanyiova, 2014; Norton, 2013). Taking this sociocultural stance, learning a language is conceptualised as a vehicle for self-explanatory and social alteration, rather than being ‘*an end-in-itself*’ (Morgan, 2007: 1035, author’s emphasis). As a result, concepts like community of practice, agency, identity, affordances and power have been increasingly used by some researchers adopting socially oriented theoretical models, as will be described in Section 2.5 (e.g. Lave and Wenger, 1991; Morgan, 2007; Norton, 2013; Sade, 2014; Sealey and Carter, 2004).

Parallel to this substantive movement in understanding the concept of language learning are the changing notions of both learning contexts and language learners. The term ‘context’ comes from the Latin ‘contexere’, which means ‘to weave together, join, or connect’ (Oxford, 2003: 80). However, Oxford (2003: 80) suggests that the term ‘context’ requires clarification, since this term has been defined differently by researchers in the field of language learning. Dickinson (1992), for instance, limits ‘context’ to the physical or external conditions of language learning taking place in literal surroundings (e.g. a classroom or a home setting), without dealing directly with psychological or social issues such as giving learners greater control over the curriculum without offering communicative and creative learning tasks or support from their teacher. Unlike Dickinson (1992), Boudieu and Passeron (1977) define ‘context’ in accordance with less tangible forms; namely, ‘cultural capital’, which refers to ‘the knowledge, credentials, and modes of thought that characterize different classes and groups’ (cited in Norton and Toohey, 2011: 420).

The concept of the learning context from cognitive psychology explanations for language learning pertains to the generalised second versus foreign language environment, (Oxford, 2003: 78). It is also viewed as a variable ‘modifying the internal acquisition process occurring in individual minds’, without giving sufficient prominence to the specific details of the immediate setting of learners (Gao and Zhang, 2011: 25). Conversely, ‘context’ or ‘real world situations’ are treated as ‘fundamental, not ancillary, to learning’ in sociocultural research, (Zuengler and Miller, 2006: 37), and they include a variety of different societal learning discourses, social agents and cultural or material artefacts (Gao, 2010a; Palfreyman, 2014). In the present research, which aims to explore the dynamic use of LLSs deployed by a group of Arab university learners of English before and after their arrival in the UK, Gao’s (2010a) view of the term ‘context’ based on both sociocultural and political-critical perspectives was adopted. According to Gao (2010a: 25) ‘context’ or ‘structure’ refers to ‘the

tangible contextual elements that are indicative of the social relations underlying their alignments and arrangements' such as materials (artefacts), discourses and social networks.

In line with this shift, language learners are no longer seen as 'individually internalizing stable systems of language knowledge' (Norton and Toohey, 2011: 419) because they are 'socially constrained but also agentic subjects' (Toohey, 2007: 240). The dynamic relationship of language learners with their learning communities is typically regarded as one of the hallmarks of sociocultural perspectives in language learning research. To exemplify the ongoing interaction between an individual learner and their contextual realities, Holland et al. (1998: 9-11) related an incident concerning a Nepali woman from Naudada belonging to a lower social class, Gyanumaya, while carrying out some interviews for a small research project. In Naudada, lower caste people are not 'culturally' permitted to enter the houses of people of a higher class because of fear of pollution, especially since the kitchens are located on the first floor. To overcome this problem, Gyanumaya acted agentively by climbing up the walls of the house to the second floor interview room. Therefore, she succeeded in achieving her desire to be interviewed without breaking the norms and traditions of her society. Based on this, social approaches to second language acquisition do not aim to erase the individual from the picture, but rather, are concerned with 'the dialectic between the individual and the social; between the human agency of these learners and the social practices of their communities' (Norton and Toohey, 2001: 308).

The above discussion reveals that the conceptualisation of the main notions in the process of language learning, such as context, language learning and learners have changed due to the social turn in second language acquisition. Related to this, sociocultural LLS researchers offer a more dynamic picture of LLSs by considering learners' strategy use as the by-product of the mediational processes of particular learning communities, along with learners'

individual cognitive choices (Gao, 2010a; Parks and Paymond, 2004). The following table summarises the major differences between the cognitivist and sociocultural perspectives on language learning:

Table 4: A contrast between cognitivist and sociocultural LLS research (based on Gao, 2010a; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Norton and Toohey, 2001; Oxford, 2003; Zuengler and Miller, 2006)

Notion	A cognitivist perspective	A sociocultural perspective
Language learning	Language learning represents mental processes such as perceiving, analysing and classifying, taking place in learners' brains.	Language learning is both 'a kind of action and a form of belonging' for learners (Wenger, 1998:4).
Language learners	Language learners are seen as 'processing devices' that transform linguistic input into performance.	Language learners are social agents who are in active pursuit of both language-related competence and non-linguistic objectives
Context	'Context' is treated as a variable that refers to the generalized environment (foreign vs. second language environment) and a modifier of learners' mental activities.	'Context' is fundamental in language learning, seen as a combination of 'culture, discourses, social agents and material resources or artefacts' (Gao, 2010a: 153).
LLSs	LLSs are associated with learners' exercise of their mental mechanisms. Therefore, they are seen as relatively stable.	LLSs are the outcome of the mediational processes in a situated learning setting along with learners' individual cognitive choices.

2.5 Sociocultural Perspectives and Language Learning Strategy Research

According to Palfreyman (2003: 245), the ‘social turn’ in education offers ‘a new dimension to the study of learning strategies’ by advancing sociocultural theory as a useful lens through which to unearth the dynamic, fluid nature of LLSs in accordance with specific learning settings and learners’ learning goals. Sociocultural theory is a unified perspective of earlier theories of Vygotsky (1978, 1981) and later views on the social formation of the mind as proposed, for example, by Engeström (1999) and Wertsch (1998). Lantolf (2000: 1) points out that the main concept of sociocultural theory is presented in Lev Vygotsky’s (1978) view that the ‘human mind is *mediated*’. This concept, as Norton and Toohey (2011: 419) note, entails that human beings act on the world with culturally created artefacts, which can be either physical such as computers and mobile phones or symbolic such as language.

These artefacts, in turn, play a vital role in mediating the relationship between subject and object (Vygotsky, 1978, cited in Lantolf and Thorne 2006: 11). The subject points to the individual or group involved in the central activity, whereas the object is the ‘focus of the activity, the issue or thing that is being acted upon’ (Daniels, 2004: 123). The symbolic tool of language, for instance, can be used by learners to mediate both ‘interpersonal (social interaction) and intrapersonal (thinking) purposes’ (Lantolf, 2000: 8). From this point of view, language learning is a social process, in which culturally and historically situated individuals engage in ‘culturally valued activities, using cultural tools’ (Norton and Toohey, 2011: 419). The triad of subject, object and mediating artefact is often illustrated by the following original triangular model of Vygotsky (1978: 40):

Figure 2 : Original triangular model of Vygotsky adapted from Daniels (2001: 86)

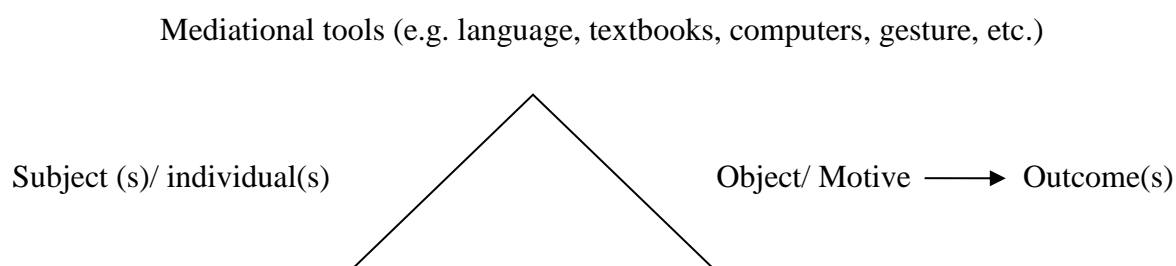


Figure 2 represents how a human interacts with the world by means of cultural artefacts. Vygotsky (1978) also indicates that the integration of cultural artefacts into thinking can result in higher mental capacities, which include ‘voluntary attention, intentional memory, planning, logical thought and problem resolving, learning, and evaluation of the effectiveness of these processes’ (Lantolf, 2000: 2). These higher mental capacities, as Oxford (2003: 86-87) argues, imply cognitive and metacognitive strategies, although Vygotsky avoided using the word ‘strategy’. Lantolf and Thorne (2006: 211) go further, highlighting that considering human actions mediated by cultural tools and signs as the unit of analysis plays a central role in breaking down the boundary between the individual and the social structure. Likewise, Engeström (2001) notes the importance of Vygotsky’s (1978) focus on mediation by tools and signs, stating that

The insertions of cultural artifacts into human actions ...overcome the split between the Cartesian individual and the untouchable societal structure. The individual could no longer be understood without his or her cultural means; and the society could no longer be understood without the agency of individuals who use and produce artifacts. (Engeström, 2001: 134).

In other words, learners’ higher order mental functioning is socially constructed and culturally transmitted by deploying different mediating artefacts while learning a specific language. Mediating artefacts might be represented in the form of objects (e.g. textbooks),

human beings (e.g. family members or teachers), symbols (e.g. language or signs) and self when they talk with themselves to regulate their internal thoughts i.e. ‘private speech’ (Atkinson, 2011: 169). ‘Private speech’ in sociocultural theory commonly represents evidence of their attempts to regulate their behavior. This mediation tool is usually used by most language learners while dealing with new tasks through accompanying their efforts with a private monologue (Mitchell and Myles, 2004: 198). In fact, the study by Frawley and Lantolf (1985) on private speech mediation in ESL tasks is considered to be the first empirical study in the field of language learning that is accommodated within the framework of sociocultural theory (Lantolf and Beckett, 2009: 459).

According to Huang and Andrews (2010: 19), Frawley and Lantolf’s (1985) empirical study, underpinned by sociocultural theory, has inspired some LLS researchers (e.g. Coyle, 2007; Donato and McCormick, 1994; Gao, 2006a, 2013a; Parks and Paymond, 2004) to advocate sociocultural language learning perspectives so as to explore the mediating role of the social context of learning (the macro) in the learners’ use and development of their LLSs. As Larsen-Freeman (2001: 23) point out, Donato and McCormick’s (1994) illuminating qualitative study, based on analysis of the portfolios of ten American female undergraduate learners of French, is considered the first empirical study that introduced a sociocultural theoretical framework for understanding learners’ strategy use and development in a particular learning context. Donato and McCormick’s (1994: 453) study showed that the use of a portfolio as a mediational means enabled the learners in this study to formulate and develop their learning goals, which are seen as ‘the genesis of strategic action’ simply because the portfolio required the learners to produce concrete evidence of their growing language abilities and LLS use. One participant (S6) clearly replicated this position when she stated:

In my first portfolio I chose things that I thought you (the instructor) would want to see in the portfolio of a good student. But gradually I began to use what helped *me* learn to converse. I think this is an example of my progress (Donato and McCormick's, 1994: 463, author's italics).

Addressing the findings of this study, both Jang and Jiménez (2011: 142) note that Donato and McCormick (1994) in their landmark study, attempted to move away from the 'encapsulated view' of LLSs, (i.e. relating learners' strategy choice and use solely to their cognitive predispositions or personality traits) by undertaking sociocultural learning theories in their pursuit of examining the influence of the social practice of the classroom culture on the participants' LLS use and development. Jang and Jiménez (2011: 142) add that adopting a sociocultural stance offers LLS researchers a complementary vision, in which learners' strategy use is not simply a cognitive choice, but emerges from the mediational processes of particular learning communities, including artefacts, practices, interactions, and relationships among people (see also Gao, 2010a; Lee, 2014; Norton and McKinney, 2011).

Although sociocultural perspectives represent 'a robust framework for investigating and explaining the development and use of strategies and mediation is a critical variable in the development of strategic learning' (Donato and MacCormick, 1994: 462), LLS studies undertaken from this standpoint are 'still relatively rare' (Mason, 2010: 647). Some sociocultural LLS studies (Gao, 2010a; Coyle, 2007; Parks and Paymond, 2004) will be described in detail in Section 3.5.2. The present study represents the first in-depth qualitative LLS study to address Arab learners' dynamic strategy use from a sociocultural viewpoint in a range of different settings in the UK, including neighbourhood, workplace, educational and religious communities.

2.5.1 Components of Sociocultural Theory relevant to Language Learning Strategy

Research

According to Huang and Andrews (2010: 20), there are two fundamental notions that link the field of LLSs to sociocultural theory. These are ‘strategic interaction with contexts, and goal-orientation’. These two notions appear to confirm the potential to adopt a sociocultural theoretical framework to explore learners’ actual strategy use, because such a framework can reveal the crucial role of both ‘macro- (learning context) and micro- (individual) levels’ in understanding the strategic learning efforts of language learners (i.e. the interaction between learner agency and contextual conditions) (Coyle, 2007: 65). Accordingly, the next section will discuss the two notions presented by Huang and Andrews (2010), accommodated mainly within the principles of activity theory and mediated learning.

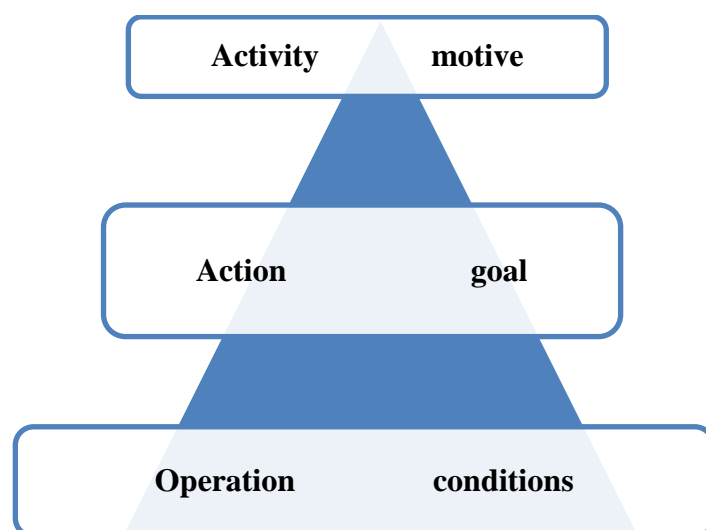
2.5.1.1 Activity Theory and Human Agency

Activity theory, a sub-theory of sociocultural theory, was originally proposed by Vygotsky’s colleague, A. N. Leontiev (1981), and highlights the fact that ‘socially-organized and goal-directed actions play a central role in human development’ (Lantolf and Beckett, 2009: 460). That is, an activity carried out consciously by individuals should be the prime unit of analysis of any human behaviour, in order to recognise the pivotal role of mediation by other human beings and some material or cultural tools. Leontiev (1981) in Donato’ and McCormick’s words (1994: 55) defines activity as ‘the who, what, when, where, and why, the small recurrent dramas of everyday life, played on the stage of home, school, community, and workplace’. In order to enhance the analytic power of activity theory, Leontiev (1981) adopts

a hierarchical approach that structures human activities, including learners' learning activities, into three levels of abstraction (see Figure 3).

These levels are: *activity*, which refers to human behaviour in a general sense and is accompanied with motives; *action*, which is goal-oriented and inseparable from a conscious goal; and *conditions*, under which goal-oriented actions or strategies are carried out in accordance with the changing conditions of the situation, task, person, and sociocultural context (Lantolf, 2000: 8; McCafferty et al., 2001: 289). For example, when an advanced language learner comes across a new word in a text, they will automatically employ contextual clues to guess its meaning i.e. without consciously attending to them. However, the strategy of contextual guessing may be reactivated if the language learner encounters a text in which the difficulty lies beyond their linguistic competence. Thus, changing conditions can lead to changes in how an action (strategy) is implemented.

Figure 3: Leontiev's hierarchical structure of activities adapted from Daniels (2001: 87)



According to Kim (2010: 9), Leontiev's (1981) version of activity theory can be used in LLS research as a useful conceptual framework to explore learners' actual strategy use because this theory understands 'the human world as an open system, which can be modified in

relation to both contextual changes and learners' (or agents') recognition of them'. Indeed, it is agency that gives dynamism to learners' strategic behaviour since they constantly alter their strategy use to achieve their goals according to contextual changes (Gao, 2013b).

In arguing against a widespread viewpoint of language learners as 'processing devices' within SLA research and for a recognition of learners as 'people' with 'human agency', Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001: 146) identify 'significance' as the most distinctive attribute of human agency. More precisely, Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001: 146), drawing on Leontiev's (1981) version of activity theory, assume that the main concern of human agency is not the mere performance of an action or 'doing' it, but instead 'the meanings and interpretations' assigned to the actions carried out by the acting individual and others who are engaged in the action. In this regard, 'it is agency that links motivation...to actions'. Human agency, in turn, is socially and historically constructed, and is influenced by learners' personal histories of language learning (Duran, 2015: 77) (for a comprehensive review of the construct of 'agency' in language education, see Benson and Cooker, 2013a; Deters et al. 2015; Jing and Benson, 2013).

Gillette (1994), for instance, has directly explored the implications of activity theory on the development of LLS use by conducting a series of in-depth case studies of three successful and three less successful adult language learners enrolled in a French course in a United States university. The choice of the six learners was mainly based on their writing samples and their scores on a cloze test and an oral imitation task, as well as on classroom observations. Through extensive interviews, class notes and diaries, Gillette (1994: 197) confirmed that the personal histories of the participants played a key role in forming their different motives and goals for studying a foreign language (e.g., to learn the language or to fulfil the language requirement), which in turn influenced the kinds of LLSs that the

participants deployed. For example, one of Gillette's successful learners, B, was a native speaker of Chinese, but had positive personal experience in relation to learning foreign languages, having grown up in Hong Kong, where language skills are seen as a valuable addition to the influence of her multilingual parents. Accordingly, B's individual sociocultural history of learning foreign languages led her to have a genuine interest in learning French and to use effective LLSs such as inferencing and functional practice. Conversely, J, the less successful learner, had a completely different language learning experience, in which learning foreign languages had little meaning in his life because he had never travelled out of his hometown, and thus he regarded learning foreign languages as 'useless baggage' (Gillette, 1994: 197). Indeed, J's main goal of fulfilling a course requirement and his sociocultural background, as Gillette (1994: 211) argues, led him to employ markedly less effective LLSs such as translation and rote learning. For this reason, learner agency is about more than 'an inherent capacity' (Malcolm, 2011: 198) or 'voluntary control over behavior' (Lier, 2008: 163). It is seen as 'something that a person can achieve...only in transaction with a particular situation' (Biesta and Tedder, 2006: 19). However, Burr (1995) upholds the view that learner agency is liable to change because

...human agents are capable (given the right circumstances) of critically analyzing the discourse which frame their lives and of claiming or resisting them according to the effects they wish to bring about (Burr, 1995: 90).

In the light of the above discussion, human activity as seen in activity theory seems to be dynamic and non-static, and subject to probable changes where the circumstances of the individual alter. Accordingly, such a model may serve to replicate a contextualised and flexible picture of the LLSs deployed by language learners.

2.5.1.2 Mediation and Strategic Interaction with Contexts

As already described in Section 2.3.1, most LLS research studies undertaken from cognitivist approaches have tended to portray a language learner as a relatively decontextualised cognitive being, acting on L2 input and producing L2 output (Barkhuizen et al. 2014: 11) rather than as ‘sociohistorically, socioculturally, and sociopolitically situated individuals with multiple subjectivities and identities (e.g., not only as *language learners*)’ (Duff and Talmy, 2011: 97, authors’ emphasis). However, this impoverished view of language learners, as Mercer (2011: 427) points out, has been improved after the ‘social turn’ in SLA, by acknowledging ‘the agentic interaction between learners and their environments and learning contexts’ mediated by different types of ‘contextual affordances’. According to Palfreyman (2006: 354), contextual affordances stand for opportunities afforded by the learning context to learners to organise and regulate their language learning, including ‘material and cultural resources’ (e.g. assessment modes, technology, textbooks), ‘social resources’ (e.g. family members and teachers) and ‘discursive learning’ (i.e. motives and beliefs). Therefore, Lantolf (2013: 19) postulates that language learners need to be viewed as ‘human-entities-acting-with-mediational-means’, simply because disparaging the value of social and cultural affordances leads to engendering ‘human organisms’, rather than ‘human agentic individuals’.

‘Material resources’ include authentic materials (e.g. maps, travel brochures, phone books), teaching materials (e.g. dictionary, textbooks, handouts), equipment (e.g. computers, mobile phones) or, in a broader sense, funds (Palfreyman, 2006: 355). Donato and McCormick (1994: 455) and Gao (2010a: 22) argue that the LLSs used by language learners are often influenced by the availability and accessibility of material and cultural artefacts, such as borrowing some valuable references from the school’s library or watching English TV

programmes. Palfreyman (2006: 355) further emphasises the complex nature of the social practices associated with material resources, which are ‘open to interpretation’, depending on how the material resources fit into a particular setting. Wray (2011), meanwhile, suggests that mobile phones which are often used outside a formal educational setting to carry out different activities (e.g. talking with others, sending emails, listening to music, watching videos...etc.) can be introduced into schools. Wray (2011) adds that although such an artefact can bring about a serious shift from the traditional form of education and can have some advantages (e.g. getting help from friends outside school, using online dictionary and relevant resources), many educational systems around the world, including those in the Arab World, ban mobile phones in schools.

Since most material resources are activated by other human beings, social resources or agents (e.g. family members, teachers, neighbours and fellow learners) often play a significant role in mediating learners’ higher mental processes and strategy use. A fundamental concept in drawing on social resources is that of a social network: ‘a system of relationships between individuals which channels, and is constituted by, social interaction’ (Palfreyman, 2006: 356). As repeatedly stated, the advent of sociocultural approaches in language learning research has greatly contributed to realising the potential of historical, cultural and social factors of language learning. Bearing this in mind, Gao (2006b: 287) indicates that language learning and language learner development constitute ‘a socialization process’, mediated not only by teachers’ efforts within the classroom but also by ‘various social agents in contexts where language learning occurs’. Therefore, language learning can take place ‘in family, community, workplace and classroom’ (Watson-Gegeo, 2004: 340).

Norton' and Toohey's (2001) study, for example, took a sociocultural lens, showing clearly how a Polish adult learner of English, Eva, was viewed as a GLL by developing her English competence through her use of social networks in the community in which she was working, a fast-food restaurant (for more explanation about this study, see Sections 2.2.1 and 2.5.2). As may be seen, influential social agents can also internalise learners' motivational discourses (motives and beliefs) about learning a particular language. Indeed, discourses about language learning may be considered the most important source of contextual mediation because they reveal learners' 'values, attitudes, and beliefs attached to learning a foreign language' (Gao, 2010a: 21). The motivational discourses and learning beliefs in turn tend to influence learners' strategy use through affecting learners' creative efforts and engagement in learning a language (Huang and Andrews, 2010: 23). For example, in Gao's (2006a: 290) study of a group of 20 English learners from well-off Chinese families, the processes of strategy development and use were seen to be mediated by family figures who created learning discourses to motivate the participants to learn English. The following conversation between a participant, Nana, and the researcher can explain this idea:

Nana: [...] I had already known the enormous importance of English language when I was three.

Researcher: You were three?

Nana: I am not exaggerating! It started from when I could remember things. I remembered that I was told by my grandfather-in-law, grandmother-in-law, grandfather, grandmother, father, mother, aunties, and uncles. They all tried their best to convince me that English, as a language, is very important! (Gao, 2006a: 290)

The above conversation may also show us how the contextual resources were integrated with each other in the process of language learning. For this reason, Huang and Andrews (2010) drawing on a sociocultural framework affirm that LLS use is the by-product of

learners' personal discourse patterns embedded in their situated learning experience; by cultural artifacts; and by interpersonal interactions with their teachers, peers and family members; and situated in their communities of language learning practices and social cultures (Huang and Andrews, 2010: 19).

The next section deals with some empirical LLS studies underpinned by sociocultural language learning perspectives. This will unveil the interplay between contextual conditions and learners' human agency in mediating and shaping their strategic language behaviour.

2.5.2 Empirical LLS Studies Adopting a Sociocultural Theoretical Framework

As previously explained in Section 2.3, the field of LLSs has been challenged by some language learning researchers (e.g. Dörnyei, 2005; Ortega, 2009; Tseng et al, 2006) on the grounds that the dominant underlying theoretical perspective in most LLS studies has been cognitivist. This essentially portrays the trait and decontextualised aspect of learners' strategy use by relying greatly on survey methods. A more qualitative and context-sensitive approach has thus been emphasised by some socially oriented researchers (e.g. Donato and McCormick, 1994; Gao, 2010a; Jang and Jiménez, 2011; Lee, 2014) to examine language learners' dynamic and contextualised use of LLSs along with their own learning motivations and beliefs. This trend has also been recently recognised by some cognitivist LLS researchers, who restrict the focus of their studies to the linguistic gains of using LLSs (i.e., seeing a language learner as 'a mere learner' rather than as 'an individual with multiple identities'). For example, Griffiths and Oxford (2014: 3-4) look at a sociocultural perspective on LLS as 'a sound theoretical base', suggesting that although questionnaire surveys 'have formed the "backbone" of strategy research', 'there is a need for richer descriptions of LLS use. This can be achieved by using more qualitative methods'. As a result, the present

qualitative research is underpinned by a sociocultural standpoint, to facilitate the exploration of the language learning experiences of eight postgraduate learners from six Arab countries (Emirates, Jordan, Iraq, Libya, Saudi Arabia, and Syria) and their strategic learning efforts in the UK, underlying the *quality* of the enabling learning resources attainable to the participants more than the *quantity* of such resources.

The body of sociocultural LLS research has actually contributed to enriching our insights into the mediated nature of LLSs in classroom culture, including artefacts, interactions and relations among people (e.g., Coyle 2007; Donato and McCormick 1994; Jang and Jiménez 2011), the examination of GLL social practices in both natural and formal settings (Norton and Toohey, 2001, 2003) and the dynamism of learners' strategy use in response to shifting learning contexts across time (e.g., Gao 2010; 2013a; Parks and Raymond 2004). Inspired by the seminal paper of Donato and McCormick (1994: 462) where 'the classroom culture was itself strategic', Coyle (2007) advocated a sociocultural theoretical framework in her qualitative study of a British mixed-ability class of 11-year-old beginner learners of German in the UK to understand the mediating role of the social context of learning, especially the classroom setting, on learners' strategy use. To answer this inquiry, Coyle (2007: 68) used different data collection procedures, including 'field notes (teacher and researchers), video-recorded lessons, digital compilation of video extracts, audio-recorded and transcribed reflective discussions between teacher and researchers, lesson plans, evaluation and student work'.

The sociocultural framework adopted in Coyle's (2007) study focused ultimately on three principles: Vygotsky's (1978) notions of activity and the 'zone of proximal development' (ZPD) in addition to Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of 'community of practice'. According to Vygotsky (1978), the 'human mind is *mediated*' which implies that human

activities are basically mediated through using material or symbolic tools (e.g. computers and language) or through ‘interpersonal interaction’ (Lantolf, 2000: 1, author’s italics). Recognising the ‘interpersonal interaction’ between individuals within the classroom setting using language or a technological tool necessitates referring to another of Vygotsky’s notions- the ‘zone of proximal development’ (ZPD). The ZPD describes the difference between the novice’s (i.e. a less capable learner) accomplishment when acting alone and that when getting the scaffolding from a more capable person(s) (i.e. a teacher or peers) (Mitchell and Myles, 1998: 146). Related to the main ideas of Vygotsky’s mediation and ZPD is Lave and Wenger’s (1991) concept of ‘community of practice’. ‘A community of practice’, as Oxford (2011: 29) argues, refers to ‘an authentic, meaningful group centred on specific practices, goals, beliefs, and areas of learning’ within a particular situated setting that can either facilitate or constrain learning. Accordingly, Coyle (2007: 66) regarded the classroom, mediated by technology as a ‘learning community’, and highlighted the fact that exploring LLSs used by learners requires focusing on the interactions taking place within the classroom.

The main findings of Coyle’s (2007) study showed that three factors played a vital role in encouraging learners to use certain LLSs within the classroom: ‘classroom culture, scaffolding learning (mediation) and learning opportunities’ (ibid: 75). That is, the classroom culture of Coyle’s (2007) study was inspired by the goal-orientation of the teacher, who focused from the very beginning on LLSs that could help her learners build their self-confidence and increase their motivation for learning German such as guessing the meaning of new words from the context and using the target language from the beginning. Moreover, the learners of Coyle’s (2007) study were encouraged to scaffold each other through discussing topics in pairs/group and to appreciate their own contribution and that of their peers along with being given opportunities to ask questions and initiate new ideas.

Consequently, Coyle (2007), like Donato and McCormick (1994), believed that learners' strategy use was strongly linked to the mediation and socialisation in a specific learning context and hence could not be directly exported from one context into another. The conclusion of Coyle's (2007: 77) study sheds light on the importance of carrying out further LLS studies that combine 'both a micro and macro approach to learning strategies' (i.e. focus on the interaction between learner agency and contextual conditions in learners' strategy use). Nonetheless, the mere focus on the classroom and the interactions that grow out of it are likely to be insufficient to capture a holistic understanding of language learners' LLS use and development, on the grounds that both 'classroom and out-of-class learning are equally important' (Benson, 2011a: 7).

While the LLS studies of Donato and McCormick (1994) and Coyle (2007) mainly examined the impacts of the practices taking place in classroom settings on learners' strategy use, Norton and Toohey (2001) broadened this perspective by investigating learners' patterns of strategic learning efforts in both naturalistic and formal settings. Drawing on sociocultural approaches to understanding language learning, Norton and Toohey's (2001: 308) study focused on the 'situated experiences' of two Polish-speaking learners of English in Canada (an adult learner, Eva, and a kindergarten learner, Julie) and their creative efforts to gain access to the communities in which they were learning English (for more discussion about this study, see Section 2.2.1). According to Norton and Toohey (2001: 308), focusing on the 'situated experiences' of the two learners is fundamental to understanding their strategy use, viewed as the outcome of interplay between 'the human agency of these learners and the social practices of their communities'. Eva, for example, succeeded in using her workplace community, a fast-food restaurant, to develop her English language and integrate into the desired community, because the social practices in the community in which she was working

(e.g. having a good relationship with colleagues) enabled her to employ her intellectual and social resources such as knowledge of Italian and of European countries.

Consequently, Norton and Toohey's (2001:318) study painted a more complex picture of learners' strategy use by affirming that the use of LLSs should not be completely ascribed to learners' individual traits and cognitive capacity because the opportunities that their communities offer also needed to be taken into account. In this regard, learner agency which includes 'the learners' will (e.g., concerns, desires, and visions) and capacity to act in and control the learning process' is basically shaped by the opportunities offered to them in a specific context (Gao, 2013b: 228).

Guided by a sociocultural language learning viewpoint, Parks and Raymond (2004) carried out an outstanding longitudinal qualitative LLS study with 18 Chinese learners following an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course in a Canadian University. The central aim of Parks and Raymond's (2004) study was to explore the extent to which the social context of learning could facilitate or hinder these Chinese learners' development of using LLSs, by comparing their situation when they were in sheltered classes separate from the Canadian learners and in electives where they studied alongside the Canadian learners. In addressing this inquiry, Parks and Raymond (2004) employed different data collection procedures, including interviews with students and EAP teachers along with class observations and collection of documents such as course outlines and samples of learners' work.

The sociocultural theoretical framework used in Parks and Raymond's (2004) study was based on two fundamental concepts: Engeström's (1991) version of activity theory and Bakhtin's (1981) distinction between authoritative and persuasive discourse. Engeström (1991), as Lantolf and Pavelenko (2001: 148) explain, believed that 'the relation between the subject and object is not only mediated by the immediate tools (materials as well as ideas)

that are employed by the individual, but also by the community in which the individual is embedded'. In other words, a learner is viewed as an active agent, whose motivation to achieve a certain goal is often affected by their personal history and experiences accumulated in the community. Thus, the learner usually adopts the means or strategies that correspond with the aims of their community. Concerning Bakhtin's (1981: 343) differentiation between authoritative and persuasive discourse, the former represents individuals' 'unconditional allegiance' to different ideologies (religious, political, pedagogical...etc.), whereas the latter is open in its nature, and thus it may be altered, extended, or framed in new contexts.

Parks and Raymond's (2004) study suggested that the learners' interaction with native speakers in electives had mediated their strategy use in three areas: reading textbooks, attending lectures and participation in group work. One participant (Helen), for instance, indicated that she learnt to use note-taking strategies from her Canadian classmates in order to improve her understanding of textbook materials and ability to participate actively in classroom discussions. Moreover, the study participants chose a strategy of being in isolated groups from the Canadian colleagues while discussing topics in groups. They did so because their Canadian classmates were not willing to accept them as 'valued partners' thinking that working with Chinese learners might affect their own proximal goal of getting high grades (ibid: 385). For this reason, Parks and Raymond (2004: 374) affirmed that learners' strategy use was 'a complex, socially situated phenomenon, bound up with...personal identity'. In other words, the Chinese learners' use or non-use of certain LLSs was the by-product of issues pertinent to social and personal identity implicated, for example, in their relationship with Canadian classmates and teachers.

A further qualitative LLS study underpinned by a sociocultural standpoint was conducted by Gao (2010a), who investigated the language learning experiences of a group of 22 mainland

Chinese undergraduates with a special focus on their strategic language learning efforts prior to and after their arrival in an English-medium university in Hong Kong. More specifically, the study attempted to explore the extent to which the selection of participants' LLSs rested on their own agency or was 'mediated by the particular social contexts' in which they were engaged (ibid: 17). Addressing this inquiry was done in three stages: (1) using questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with all study participants concerning their language strategy use on the Chinese mainland, (2) presenting case studies of six learners' experiences and their shifting strategy use in Hong Kong using different means to collect data (regular conversations, field notes, strategy checklist and email correspondence) and (3) providing follow-up interview data from 15 of the original group of 22 to explore their strategic learning efforts in Hong Kong.

Like the findings of most LLS studies undertaken from the point of view of sociocultural theory, Gao's (2010a: 161) study confirmed that examining the participants' language learning experiences played a fundamental role in understanding the complexity of their LLS use resulting from a constant interaction between agency and contextual realities such as material resources, culture and mediating agents. In other words, Gao (2010a: 154) believed that although learners' strategy use was often 'a constrained choice' by contextual realities, it still reflected their 'will and capacity to act'. For example, one participant (Liu) was creative in her attempts to overcome contextual constraints in Hong Kong, where she not only encountered the linguistic challenges of developing her English level but also of participating in the community of local learners with whom she shared neither a first language nor a culture. Liu, in fact, developed her English in Hong Kong by using particular LLSs such as listening regularly to English radio and watching English TV programmes, and accessing local learners' groups through learning Cantonese from a Hong Kong colleague. For this reason, Gao (2010a), like Norton and Toohey (2001), points out that a language learner is an

active social agent who learns a language for both linguistic objectives and non-linguistic ones i.e. having a sense of belonging or identity.

According to Gao (2010a: 154), a principal implication of the study is that language learners should be encouraged to improve their ‘critical understanding of particular social learning contexts’ to help them seek out the most beneficial learning opportunities. However, Mason (2010: 648), in reviewing Gao’s (2010a) book, notes that ‘it is not entirely clear’ how the implications of Gao’s (2010a) LLS study ‘can be achieved practically’. Mason (2010: 647) also mentions that although LLSs can be unobservable mental operations or observable behaviour (see Section 2.2.2), most strategies described in Gao’s (2010a) study are included in ‘overt, motor behaviour’ type such as attending a language class or socialising with other social agents. Furthermore, although Gao (2010a: 17) questions the availability of using strategy surveys to ‘measure the reality of learners’ strategy use in particular contexts’, he nevertheless adopted Oxford’s (1990) SILL as the main research method in the first stage of his study. This matter might be partially ascribed to the fact that the first stage of Gao’s study was based on his MA study conducted at Warwick University in 2002. Accordingly, he used other qualitative methods in the second and third stages of his study after recognising the weaknesses of using questionnaires in LLS research.

As shown in the above discussion, the sociocultural LLS studies have focused on the learner-in-the-context rather than on the trait and decontextualised aspect of LLSs presented by the widespread cognitive psychology perspective on LLS research. These few sociocultural LLS studies have demonstrated that interpreting the contextualised and situated experiences of language learners can inform us about the complex nature of LLSs, resulting from an ongoing dialectic between human agency and contextual conditions, including contextual discourses,

material/cultural artefacts (examinations and learning materials) and social agents (family, teachers and colleagues).

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has presented a detailed account of existing LLS research by discussing its theoretical and methodological issues. It has also documented the shifting language learning research landscape before going on to describe how sociocultural perspectives have been advanced as a useful lens through which to consider LLS use. This chapter has further discussed the existence of affinity between theoretical underpinnings of sociocultural perspectives and conceptual understanding of LLS as a state (i.e. actual and dynamic deployment of strategies in different learning settings), by sharing two essential notions: ‘strategic interaction with contexts, and goal-orientation’. However, empirical studies undertaken from a sociocultural viewpoint are still relatively rare. Accordingly, the present research resembles the first longitudinal, qualitative study in the LLS field that has espoused a sociocultural framework to attain a rich and contextualised picture of LLSs used by a group of postgraduate Arab learners in a study abroad context, including their shifting learning motivations and identity development. To address this inquiry, the following research questions have been suggested:

RQ1 What are the particular patterns of LLSs often utilised by a group of University learners from an Arabic background in their homelands?

RQ2 What influences the participants’ particular patterns of LLSs in their homelands?

RQ3 What are the changes in the participants’ strategy use after arrival in the UK?

RQ4 What influences the participants’ changes in their strategy use after arrival in the UK?

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter focused on reviewing the literature relevant to the field of language learning strategy (LLSs) and justifying the sociocultural perspective on LLS research utilised in the present research. This study is the first longitudinal, qualitative study in the LLS field that has espoused a sociocultural framework to attain a rich and contextualised picture of the LLSs used by a group of postgraduate Arab learners in a study abroad context, including their shifting learning motivations, past language learning experiences and identity development. In this sense, the following research questions, presented at the end of Chapter 2, need to be answered:

RQ1 What are the particular patterns of LLSs often utilised by a group of University learners from an Arabic background in their homelands?

RQ2 What influences the participants' particular patterns of LLSs in their homelands?

RQ3 What are the changes in the participants' strategy use after arrival in the UK?

RQ4 What influences the participants' changes in strategy use after arrival in the UK?

This chapter sets out the methodological approach used in this study, namely phenomenography as a qualitative methodological framework. It discusses the following issues: the origin of phenomenography, the ontological, methodological and epistemological underpinnings of phenomenography, the strengths and weaknesses of phenomenography along with the rationale and use of phenomenography in this research.

3.2 The Research Approach: The Origin of Phenomenography

Etymologically, the term ‘phenomenography’ derives from the Greek words ‘phainomenon’ and ‘graphein’, which mean ‘appearance’ and ‘description’ respectively (Hasselgren and Beach, 1997: 192). Accordingly, ‘phenomenography’ as a combined term represents the ‘description of appearances’, suggesting that it is concerned with ‘the descriptions of things as they appear to us’ (Pang 2003: 145). Åkerlind (2012: 115) points out that phenomenography resides within an interpretative paradigm and originally emerged from ‘a strongly empirical rather than theoretical or philosophical basis’ when Marton and Säljö (1976) conducted a landmark study at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden with a group of first-year university learners, in order to understand why learners who approach the same learning problem or opportunity usually arrive at different outcomes or solutions.

By analysing the transcripts of participants’ interviews, Marton’ and Säljö (1976) suggested that the participants’ qualitative variations in the outcomes of their learning were ascribed to their differences in approaching the text, either with the intention of understanding the text (i.e. ‘deep approach’) or of simply reproducing and memorising it (i.e. ‘surface approach’) (Case and Marshall, 2009: 10). In commenting on the findings of Marton’ and Säljö’s (1976) study, Souleles (2012: 467) postulates that this study was not only the foundation of approaches to education research (i.e. deep and surface approaches), but also the origin of the phenomenography methodology and its theoretical underpinnings. Ference Marton (1981), in his seminal paper on phenomenography, laid much of the early foundations for the ontological and epistemological basis of phenomenography, which will be explained in the forthcoming sections.

According to Marton (1994: 4425), phenomenography is ‘[T]he empirical study of the limited number of qualitatively different ways in which various phenomena in, and aspects

of, the world around us are experienced, conceptualized, understood, perceived, and apprehended'. In other words, a primary assumption underlying phenomenographic research is not describing the phenomenon itself (e.g. what are the salient features of LLSs?), but rather discovering the range of similar and different ways that individuals experience and understand a particular phenomenon in the world around them (e.g. how language learners accomplish their different future visions). 'A phenomenon' from a phenomenographic perspective is treated as 'the combination of different ways in which an aspect of the world is conceived or experienced' by a group of individuals (Bruce, 1999: 35).

Qingxia (2012: 12) further emphasises the potential of phenomenography research, which stands for a departure from a scientific approach to learning to considering the varied ways of understanding a given phenomenon as experienced by a group of individuals. A scientific approach to learning, as Edwards (2011: 49) notes, is based on identifying variables, then proposing hypotheses and finally testing those hypotheses. The present research also criticises the scientific approach to language learning because this approach seems to negate the influence of learners' agency and their situated learning setting (see Section 2.2.1, Chapter 2). The scientific approach has been applied implicitly in some LLS studies, through the use of cognitive psychology theories to test the two main hypotheses:

- Good language learners (GLLs) have a richer repertoire of LLSs than their less successful counterparts, and hence employ a great number of LLSs.
- Some LLSs tend to be effective to all language learners in all learning contexts.

As shown above, phenomenography resonates with the goals of the current research, which attempts to understand the varying ways of approaching the phenomenon of completing postgraduate studies through the medium of English in the UK by a group of University

learners from their own perspectives, with a special focus on their strategic language learning efforts.

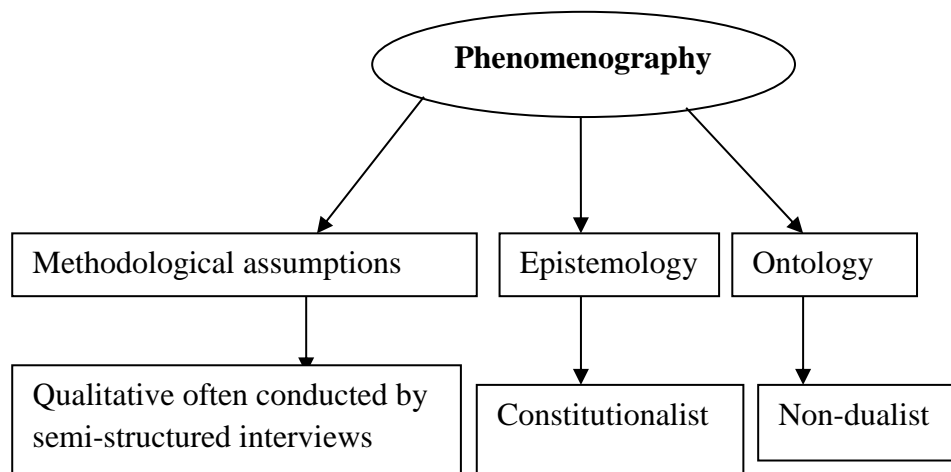
3.3 Theoretical Underpinnings of Phenomenography

As stated in the previous section, the main purpose of phenomenographic research is to discern different ways of understanding a given phenomenon. ‘Understanding’ in this context signifies ‘people’s ways of experiencing or making sense of their world’ (Sandberg, 2000: 12). Note that within the phenomenography literature, the terms ‘experiences’, ‘conceptions’, ‘perceptions’ and ‘understandings’ are often used interchangeably (Marton and Booth, 1997: 114). This thesis also follows this practice. Marton (1997) explains the reason behind this, indicating that

The words ‘experience’, ‘perceive’, and so on are used interchangeably. The point is not to deny that there are differences in what these terms refer to, but to suggest that the limited number of ways in which a certain phenomenon appears to people can be found, for instance, regardless of whether they are embedded in immediate experience of the phenomenon or in reflected thought about the same phenomenon. (Marton 1997: 97)

According to Marton and Booth (1997: 135), phenomenography as a basic research approach ‘should be defined in terms of its object of research’, taking into account its specific methodological, ontological (i.e., the nature of the phenomenon we are seeking to understand) and epistemological (i.e., how we know what we know) assumptions. The following figure delineates the relationships between the ontological, epistemological and methodological underpinnings of the current research, which will be discussed in the coming sections.

Figure 4: The relationships between ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions of phenomenography



3.3.1 Ontological Assumptions in Phenomenography

Etymologically, the term ‘ontology’ derives from the Greek words ‘onto’, which means ‘being’ and ‘logos’, which is usually interpreted as ‘science’ (Jensen and Bork, 2010: 1). Accordingly, ontology is ‘the philosophical study of the nature of being and existence’ (ibid). Bryman (2012: 6) mentions that ontology mainly addresses the following question: ‘are social phenomena relatively inert and beyond our influence or are they very much a product of social interaction?’. This question results from the debate between objectivism and subjectivism.

3.3.1.1 A Dualist vs. A Non-dualist View of Nature

The objectivist ontology argues that ‘social phenomena and their meanings have an existence that is independent of social actors’, and so a complete explanation of reality can be made (Bryman, 2012: 696). In this regard, objectivism might appear to underestimate the key role

of learner agency by portraying the social entity as ‘something external to the actor and as having an almost tangible reality of its own’ (ibid: 18). Conversely, subjectivist ontology assumes that language learning is ‘a mental process’ and accordingly reality resides basically in the mind (Davis, 1995: 427-428). The subjectivist ontology is clearly portrayed in the LLS studies underpinned by cognitivist approaches, because these studies (e.g. El-Dib, 2004; Griffiths, 2006; Rubin, 2005) seem to ascribe learners’ success in language learning only to their personal motivation and cognitive traits, without paying sufficient attention to the importance of contextual conditions (e.g. mediating agents or learning discourse) (For more explanation of this point, see Section 2.2.3.2, Chapter 2). Accordingly, subjectivist and objectivist perspectives might appear to have a dualist view of nature, given that they concentrate on either an inner or outer world as being an explanation for the other (Marton and Booth, 1997: 12-14).

Contrary to other research methodologies, phenomenography espouses a non-dualist (relational) view of nature. According to the non-dualistic ontological position in phenomenography, the separation between ‘the internal (thinking) and the external (the world out there)’ is refused (Säljö, 1997: 173), on the grounds that these worlds are internally related through ‘the individual’s awareness of the world’ (Prosser and Trigwell, 1999: 13). Uljens (1996: 114), for example, argues that the ontological issue in phenomenography refers to ‘the relation between consciousness [awareness] and reality’. In other words, the only world about which individuals can communicate is the world they experience, and therefore, if a phenomenon is outside of their experience or awareness, then they do not know of its existence. To clarify this idea further, Marton and Booth (1997: 140) gave an example of teaching reading and writing skills to a group of children. Since children had grown up in ‘an environment in which the written word was of little importance’, they simply ‘did not understand the idea of reading and writing’ (ibid). Accordingly, these children needed to see

the relevance of reading and writing to their own world, in order to learn and express their own conceptions. Based on this, the subject (the learner) and object (the situation or problem handled) in phenomenographic studies are not separate, and an individual's understanding of a phenomenon is the internal relationship between them (i.e. 'the experiencer' and 'the experienced') (Marton and Booth, 1997: 113). This idea was fittingly epitomised by Marton (2000)

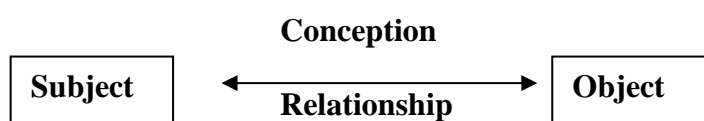
There is only one world, a really existing world, which is experienced and understood in different ways by human beings. It is simultaneously objective and subjective. An experience is a relationship between object and subject, encompassing both. (Marton, 2000: 105)

Therefore, it may appear unreasonable to compare an individual's understanding with reality itself (Uljen 1996: 112-113). Reality in phenomenographic reasoning exists 'through the way in which a person conceives of it' (ibid: 112). Related to this, ontological assumptions inherent in phenomenography are concerned with 'the nature of conceptions' (Pherali, 2011: 16).

3.3.1.2 The Nature of Conceptions

Conceptions in phenomenographic research refer to the meaning embedded in the internal relationship between a subject and a phenomenon in the world. Bruce (2003: 6) represents this internal relationship diagrammatically:

Figure 5: Graphic representation of a conception adopted from Bruce (2003: 6)



Svensson (1997: 165) argues that conceptions are reliant on ‘human activity and the world or reality external to any individual’. In other words, conceptions of phenomena in the world are usually constructed in the mind, and this construction is influenced by the world (surroundings) in which one lives. In phenomenography, the subjects’ conceptions or understandings of a particular phenomenon do not seem to be ‘genetically inherited by individuals’, but rather, are ‘socially constructed and reconstructed through the person’s ongoing experiences and relationships with their world’ (Lamb et al., 2011: 676). This idea is compatible with the sociocultural standpoint adopted in the current research, suggesting that ‘language learning takes place not just in individual learners’ minds but also in society’ (Gao, 2010a: 18).

Pherali (2011: 17) further indicates that phenomenography presents no ‘universal principles of the nature of knowledge or reality’ simply because the reality of one individual is likely to be different from that of another and is not fixed in space and time. This idea, in turn, entails that the conception of a specific phenomenon can be altered with time, as ‘input and thought processes act on the experiences’ (Smith, 2009: 106). In this regard, emphasising the dynamism and context-sensitivity of the nature of individuals’ conceptions towards a specific phenomenon seems essential to the present research, which ultimately seeks to explore qualitatively variations in the conceptions held by a group of postgraduate Arab learners of English studying in the UK towards the construct of LLSs through the lens of a sociocultural approach. Consequently, a contextualised and changing picture of LLS may be obtained.

3.3.2 Epistemological Assumptions in Phenomenography

Etymologically, the term ‘epistemology’ derives from the Greek words ‘episteme’ and ‘logos’, which mean ‘knowledge’ and ‘theory’ respectively (Johnson and Duberley, 2000:38). Accordingly, epistemology is a theory of knowledge that explains ‘how we can know the world’ (Jary and Jary, 1991: 186). More specifically, epistemology usually addresses questions such as ‘what is the relationship between the knower and what is known? How can we know what we know? What counts as knowledge?’ (Imel et al., 2002: 4).

3.3.2.1 A Constitutionalist View of Knowledge

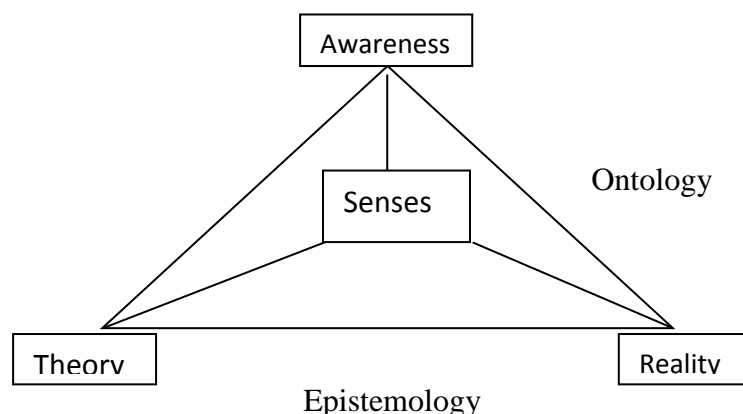
Ontological assumptions in phenomenography, as previously discussed, are non-dualist and concerned with the nature of conceptions, seen as the outcome of the internal relationship between consciousness (awareness) and reality. Pherali (2011: 17) believes that there is a close relationship between ontological and epistemological underpinnings in phenomenography, because ‘descriptions of conceptions’ are used to unearth ‘the nature of knowledge’, which is the basis of phenomenographic epistemology. Because of the non-dualistic ontological position in phenomenography, phenomenographic epistemology rests on a constitutionalist view of knowledge, which focuses on the content of description revealed by individuals in the way they experience the phenomenon (Prosser and Trigwell, 1999: 13).

Individuals, as already stated, might see and be aware of a specific phenomenon in different ways and their awareness of a phenomenon can be changed over time. The Indian fable about the ‘Blind men and the elephant’ explains how a particular phenomenon can be explained and understood differently by different individuals. The first blind man, for instance, experienced only the elephant’s tail and thought it a rope, whereas the second investigated merely the

elephant's side and thought it felt like a wall and so on. In this sense, each of the blind men has a partial awareness of what an elephant is. In order to recognise the whole picture, the blind men, through shared reflection, need to develop a greater awareness to how the parts relate and fit together. For this reason, phenomenographic research tends to focus on 'collective [rather than individual] human experience of phenomena holistically' although the same phenomenon might be understood differently by different individuals and under different circumstances (Åkerlind, 2012: 116).

Uljens (1996: 114) further points out that epistemological issues in phenomenography underpin the relationship between reality and theory (descriptions e.g. in language, sign and symbol) (Uljens, 1996: 114). The following figure shows the interdependent relationship between the ontology and epistemology of phenomenography:

Figure 6: the relationship between the ontological and epistemological issues in phenomenography (adapted from Uljens, 1996: 115)



The above figure explains that phenomenography represents a non-dualist position with respect to ontological issues, in the sense that reality is constituted through the reciprocally intertwined relationship between individuals and their own world. Regarding epistemological

phenomenography, the same figure denotes that ‘there is no knowledge in-itself’, in which theory has no direct access to a specific phenomenon (reality), but is always related to awareness and sense-making (Giorgi, 2002: 9). Without awareness, there can be no knowledge of a phenomenon. This idea, in fact, refers to the principle of intentionality of awareness in phenomenographic epistemology (Giorgi, 2005: 76).

Intentionality, as voiced by Martin et al. (2002: 104), implies that knowledge cannot exist in a context independent of the knower, and an individual’s awareness is always directed towards something other than itself i.e. it has an object. For example, some language learners whose central goal to pass an exam might deploy specific LLSs such as repetition, note-taking and rote memorisation although these LLSs might not meet another individual learner’s purpose in learning in another specific learning setting. It is worth noting that the concept of intentionality of awareness or goal-orientation has played a central role in the present research study pertinent to the field of LLS, simply because ‘the element of *choice*... is what gives a strategy its special character’ (Cohen, 2011: 7, author’s italics) (For more discussion about this idea, see Section 2.2.2, Chapter 2). Therefore, phenomenographic research seems to acknowledge the importance of individual agency in mediating language learners’ strategic learning efforts.

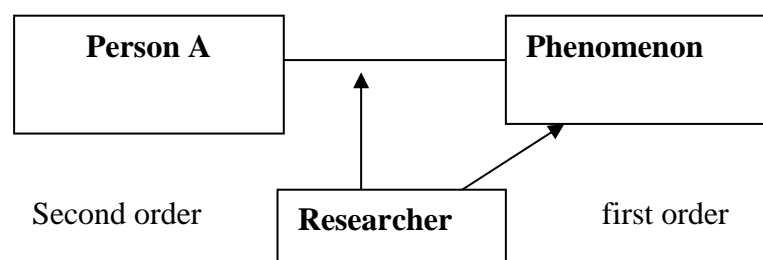
3.3.2.2 First and Second Order Perspectives

Since phenomenographers are mainly concerned with the individual’s awareness of reality (an ontological issue) and their expression of reality (an epistemological issue), phenomenography embraces a second-order perspective (i.e. how the individual conceives their world) rather than a first-order perspective. Marton (1981: 178) suggests that in the

second order perspective, ‘we [researchers] orient ourselves towards people’s ideas about the world [or their experience of it] and we make statements about people’s ideas about the world [or about their experience of it]’. This contrasts with the first order perspective, where ‘we [researchers] orient ourselves towards the world and make statements about it’ (ibid). In this sense, the world from a second-order perspective is described as it is understood rather than as it is. That is, the phenomenon under investigation is to be viewed through the awareness and reflection of the subjects, rather than the researcher’s or broader society’s (see Figure 7).

In the present research, for example, the researcher did not seek to teach his participants a particular set of LLSs during their stay in the UK, or to judge whether a specific strategy used by any participant was good or not, in accordance with ‘the universal models of good language learner’ suggested by some LLS researchers such as Rubin (1975), Stern (1975) or Larsen-Freeman (2001) (for more elaboration about this point, see Section 2.2.1, Chapter 2). Rather, capturing the participants’ awareness and inherent variation towards their language learning experiences and strategy use before and after arrival in the UK from their own viewpoints was the objective of the present study. With this in mind, Harding (2011: 59) describes phenomenography as ‘a democratic approach to research’, because the data and findings of the study are essentially based on the participants’ accounts of their awareness of conceptions of the world.

Figure 7: First- and second-order perspectives (adapted from Uljens, 1991: 85)



3.3.3 Methodological Assumptions in Phenomenography

Methodological assumptions in phenomenographic research usually address questions such as:

- What method is usually used to collect data in phenomenographic studies?
- What are the characteristics of the sample?
- What is the relationship between the researcher and the phenomenon?
- What aspects do phenomenographic researchers often see through the eyes of the participant, and what aspects do the researchers see through their own eyes?

These questions will be answered in the discussion of the following sections.

3.3.3.1 The Nature of the Phenomenographic Interview

According to Pherali (2011: 32), individual in-depth interviewing is considered to be the most common method for collecting data in phenomenography. Phenomenographic interviews are ‘more dialogic in nature’ (Felix, 2009: 147), which implies that there should be ‘a shared or joint topic’ between the researcher and their participants (Bowden, 1996: 58). The typical phenomenographic interview is of a semi-structured nature with only a very few predetermined questions, since most questions follow or develop from what the interviewee says (Collier-Reed et al., 2009: 348). In addressing this point, Marton (1986: 42) mentions that the interview questions in phenomenography should be ‘as open-ended as possible, in order to let the subject chose the dimensions of the question they want to answer’. In doing so, the interviewees can elicit their conceptions about the given phenomenon.

Collier-Reed (2006: 45), however, argues that although ‘the process of continuous probing and directed following up of comments’ in phenomenographic interviews is essential in exploring different aspects of an interviewee’s experience towards a specific phenomenon, this process might make the phenomenographic interview appear to be ‘more intimidating than a traditional qualitative interview’. In this regard, Francis (1996: 38) calls on phenomenographers to ‘treat the interviewee as a reporting subject rather than an interrogated object’. This point related to the role of phenomenographic researchers will be further explained in the forthcoming section. Phenomenographic interviews are often audio-taped and transcribed verbatim, making the transcripts the focus of the analysis (Åkerlind, 2012: 117).

Bruce (1996) further identifies two major characteristics that distinguish a phenomenographic interview from other kinds of research interview. A phenomenographic interview, as Bruce (1996: 5-6) notes, focuses on:

- the relationship between the individuals being interviewed and the theme of the interview (in the present research, strategic English learning efforts), and
- how the theme appears to, or is experienced by, the individuals being interviewed rather than on the individuals or the theme itself.

3.3.3.2 Characteristics of the Sample in Phenomenographic Studies

Boon et al. (2007: 210) postulate that the sample used in a phenomenographic study is purposive in that participants should be specifically sought out and have a shared experience of the given phenomenon. Purposeful sampling can ‘give the best data to contribute to the

constitution of the full extent of the various ways of experiencing the phenomenon' (Collier-Reed, 2006: 47). Thus, the phenomenographer should have specific criteria when choosing their subjects, in order to obtain maximal variation and similarity in the data collected. In the present research, all participants came from an Arabic background, and attended the pre-sessional English course before joining their postgraduate programmes. They were of different genders and disciplinary backgrounds, as will be explained in Chapter 4. Concerning the ideal number of participants in phenomenographic studies, Lönnberg (2012: 43) argues that seven to ten individuals might be adequate to allow variation to be revealed without producing an unwieldy volume of data to be analysed, especially as phenomenographic interviews are fairly detailed and lengthy. Therefore, eight participants were selected to be involved in the four stages of data collection of my study.

3.3.3.3 The Role of the Phenomenographic Researcher

As already explained, the main aim of researchers endorsing a phenomenographic approach is to enter into the lifeworlds of individuals participating in their study, in order to explore the participants' reflections on and awareness of a particular phenomenon. At this stage, the question rests on the sorts of behaviours which tend to be appropriate and encouraged for phenomenographers during the phenomenographic interview. According to Marton and Booth (1997: 119), phenomenographic researchers are urged to 'bracket' their own experiences of the phenomenon since prior knowledge of the phenomenon under examination could influence or colour the direction of the research.

The act of 'bracketing', or 'epoché' in phenomenographic research, is defined as 'not imposing preconceived ideas' (Marton, 1994: 4428), 'suspending judgment' (Marton and

Booth, 1997: 119), and not pre-categorising the data during interviews (Ashworth and Lucas, 1998: 418). By doing this, the categories of description constituted from the data will not be shaped by the researcher's bias as regards understanding the phenomenon under investigation. For instance, Prosser and Millar (1989), in their study with adult Swedish learners of English, do not appear to have bracketed their previous specific presuppositions, in that they adopted the same categories that had already been discovered in Johansson et al.'s (1985) study with their Australian participants. For this reason, the researcher of the current research classified the LLSs used by the participants in accordance with the research findings, rather than any pre-existing classification system, as epitomised in Chapters 6 and 7. Furthermore, 'bracketing', implies that all participant responses should be treated on an equal basis (Marton and Booth, 1997: 119).

Bearing in mind the importance of bracketing, Richardson (1999: 57) stresses that the phenomenographic researcher should attempt to 'assume as little as possible, to adopt a second-order perspective, and to describe the world as experienced by the individual'. Therefore, data collection in phenomenographic research should be viewed as 'a process of discovery' (Ashworth and Lucas, 1998: 418). In this respect, phenomenographers reject the 'natural attitude' of seeing things (i.e. 'how I see something is the way it is') because it views the world 'as an object separate from the observer' and without looking at a specific phenomenon from different perspectives (Bowden, 2005: 21). However, many daily human activities (e.g. civil court cases, arguments in the home, news analysis, and probably social interactions), as described by Bowden (2005: 21-22) operate through 'the natural attitude', which 'sees the world as an object separate from the observer'. For example, if a political analyst attempts to look at a particular issue from multiple perspectives, that analyst is generally judged as being someone who 'has no real opinion' or 'wants to be liked by everyone' (ibid).

In order to enhance the process of ‘bracketing’ in phenomenographic research, Ashworth and Lucas (2000) recommend that phenomenographers undertake the following practical steps while undertaking their studies:

- ‘make minimal use of questions prepared in advance;
- use open-ended questions;
- engage in empathic listening to hear meanings, interpretations and understandings;
- consciously silence his or her concerns, preoccupations and judgements; and
- use prompts to pursue/clarify the participant’s own line of reflection and allow the participant to elaborate, provide incidents, clarifications and, maybe, ‘to discuss events at length’ (Ashworth and Lucas, 2000: 302-303).

In this sense, bracketing should be accompanied by empathy, in order to avoid presuppositions during both data collection and analysis, and to engage with participants’ lifeworlds. Empathy, as Ashworth and Lucas (2000: 299) define it, entails ‘a detachment from the researcher’s lifeworld and an opening up to the lifeworld of the student’. More specifically, the role of the researcher is critical in phenomenographic studies, in that they should attempt to encourage an environment in which the participants would feel comfortable to talk about all of the aspects of the phenomenon of which they are aware. To clarify this point, a researcher might intend to ignore some views and factual claims expressed by some participants, because their views seem quite erroneous to the researcher’s preconceptions (ibid). However, the researcher who seeks to be empathetic and unbiased should find such views and factual claims of ‘*immense interest*’ (ibid, authors’ emphasis).

Ashworth and Lucas (2000: 299) further indicate that a complete bracketing of the researcher’s previous knowledge might not be possible, because ‘[S]ome ways of viewing the world are likely to be more difficult to set aside than others’. For example, a researcher’s

selection of their ‘critical cases’ in a phenomenographic study basically relates to their assumptions built into the ‘intuitive likelihood’ (ibid: 302). With this in mind, Adawi et al. (2002: 86-87) suggest that what the researcher needs to apply is ‘a process of reflexivity’ or ‘selective bracketing’ through pinpointing their conceptual understanding over the whole research undertaking, and looking for ways to ‘avoid steering data and analysis on preconceived paths’. This is the approach adopted by the researcher of the present research, who identifies his own beliefs and assumptions about the difficulties usually faced by Arab learners of English completing their higher studies abroad, and the strategic language learning efforts they often deploy in this regard (see Chapter 1).

3.4 Outcomes of Phenomenographic Research

As already mentioned, the aim of phenomenographic research is to elucidate the different possible conceptions that a group of participants hold in relation to a specific phenomenon, irrespective of whether their conceptions are considered ‘correct or incorrect by current standards’ (Ojo, 2008: 9). Lönnberg (2012: 42) points out that the outcome of a phenomenographer analysis and interpretations of the data, mostly gathered through a series of deep and open-ended interviews, is a hierarchical set of qualitatively different but logically related categories. The categories and the relations between them present the outcome space for the research (ibid). Åkerlind (2012) outlines the key features of the outcomes of the phenomenographic research, suggesting that

Outcomes are represented analytically as a number of qualitatively different meanings or ways of experiencing the phenomenon (called ‘categories of description’ to distinguish the empirically interpreted category from the hypothetical experience that it represents), but also including the structural relationships linking these different

ways of experiencing. These relationships represent the structure of the ‘outcome space’, in terms of providing an elucidation of relations between different ways of experiencing the one phenomenon. (Åkerlind, 2012: 116)

In other words, the description of the participants’ conceptions is called ‘categories of description’, and the graphical representation of the conceptions is called the ‘outcome space’. The following sections will discuss how the categories of description and outcome space serve as tools to capture the characteristics of the participants’ conceptions or experiences of a particular phenomenon.

3.4.1 Categories of Description and Relations with Individual Conceptions

The categories of description are the ‘interpretation of the collective voice derived from the contextualised individual voices’ (Bowden and Green, 2010: 10). In other words, they have whole characteristics that represent the central meaning of conceptions. They are not determined in advance (i.e. prior to data collection or data analysis), but emerge from the researcher’s interpretive analysis of the data to describe similarities and differences in meaning and reflect the number of qualitatively different ways of experiencing a given phenomenon at a collective level (Lönnerberg, 2012: 42-43). That is, the process of analysis in a phenomenographic study focuses on key aspects of collective experience, rather than on the richness of individual experience on the assumption that human experience tends to be partial (see Section 3.3.2.1, Chapter 3). Sandberg (1995:158) explains this point, suggesting that ‘in some cases a specific conception cannot be seen in its entirety in data obtained from a single individual, but only within data obtained from several individuals’. Nonetheless, an individual category of description can be created by data attained from only one participant.

Furthermore, quotes from the data are used to provide evidence of the important features of each category (Åkerlind et al. 2005: 90).

Marton (1988: 181) in turn identifies four characteristics of categories of description, which are relational, experiential, content-orientated and qualitative. More specifically, categories of description are relational and experiential because they reflect the interrelated relationship between the subject and their own experience of a specific phenomenon in a particular setting. Besides, they are content-oriented because they focus on the meaning of the phenomenon being studied. Furthermore, they are qualitative and descriptive since they are made visible through language (ibid). According to Marton and Booth (1997: 128), there are two central distinctions between categories of description and individual conceptions in phenomenographic research. The first is that categories of description are created by the phenomenographer to represent as closely as possible the participants' conceptions at a collective level (ibid). The second is that each category of description merely focuses on the critical aspects of a way of understanding the given phenomenon, which differentiate it from other ways of experiencing. Conversely, an individual's conceptions may encompass aspects related to multiple categories or might refer to another phenomenon. The collection of categories of description constitutes the *outcome space*, which will be described in the next section.

3.4.2 Outcome Space

The outcome space of a phenomenographic study is a diagrammatic representation of a finite set of hierarchically structured categories of description in relation to the phenomenon under investigation (Hallett, 2010: 229). It outlines how categories of description are logically

related to each other. Watkins and Bell (2002: 17) ascribe the finite number of categories of description in a phenomenographic study to individuals' limited capacities 'to discern and be simultaneously aware of all the possible ways of comprehending a phenomenon' although their awareness of a given phenomenon is theoretically infinite and open to new modes of experience (ibid). In a phenomenographic outcome space, the structural relationships are of 'hierarchical inclusiveness', with some categories being more advanced and complex than others (Åkerlind et al., 2005:95). Marton and Booth (1997: 125-126) outline three key criteria for judging the quality of a phenomenographic outcome space:

1. Each category of description in the outcome space should say something distinct about a certain way of understanding the phenomena;
2. Categories should have a logical relationship, which is often hierarchical. That is, there should be 'a series of increasingly complex subsets of the totality of the diverse ways of experiencing various phenomena'. For example, the 'outcome space' or 'thematic map' of the findings at each stage of my study included both 'themes' and 'sub-themes', as will be presented in Chapters 6 and 7.
3. The outcome space should include as few categories as possible to capture the critical variation in the data. That is, the outcome space has to be 'parsimonious' (Marton and Booth, 1997: 126).

Note that the terms 'outcome space' and 'thematic map' are used interchangeably in this thesis, given that both of them refer to the graphical representation of the concepts or themes produced by researcher.

3.5 Summary of Phenomenography as a Methodology

The discussion so far in this chapter has focused on presenting a detailed description of the origins, purposes and theoretical underpinnings of phenomenographic research, in order to provide a background to the conduct of the current research study. As already explained, ‘[T]he unit of phenomenographic research is a way of experiencing something ... and the object of the research is variation in ways of experiencing something’ (Marton and Booth 1997: 11). Stokes et al. (2011: 124) summarise the fundamental assumptions adopted in phenomenographic research:

1. Individuals often experience or understand a specific phenomenon or aspect of reality differently, and thus hold different conceptions of it.
2. An individual’s conceptions can be accessed e.g., verbally or in writing.
3. There are a limited number of categories of description of the variation in the given phenomenon.
4. The categories of description or ways of experiencing a phenomenon are logically related, typically by way of hierarchy from simple to complex.

3.6 Strengths and Weaknesses of Phenomenographic Research

Bruce (1997: 5) identifies the following advantages of implementing phenomenography:

- it provides direct descriptions of the phenomenon of interest;
- it describes individuals’ conceptions in a holistic and integrated way;

- it can capture a range of conceptions, due to its focus on both similarity and variation in individuals' experiences; and
- it produces descriptions of conceptions which are useful in teaching and learning.

Likewise, Pherali (2011: 14-15) notes that the main strength of phenomenography can be effectively realised in higher education research through uncovering learners' awareness and variation in approaching the same phenomenon by attending to and describing the world as experienced, taking into account the key role of the situated setting of learning. To clarify this point, Pherali (2011) states that:

Phenomenography has become a popular research strategy in higher education research since students' learning does not only depend on their cognitive process but also on the context within which their learning occurs...In this case, phenomenographic studies have valuable potential for educational improvement, by developing respect for learners' perspectives in pedagogy (Pherali, 2011: 15).

In this sense, phenomenography recognises the importance of contextual realities in scaffolding language learners' cognitive and metacognitive mechanisms. Indeed, this was one of the central reasons for me to embrace phenomenography in my research guided by a sociocultural standpoint.

The major problem of phenomenography is its preference to 'equate participants' experiences with their *accounts* of those experiences' (Orgill, 2012: 2609; author's emphasis). In other words, Orgill (2012: 2610) casts doubt on the soundness of Marton's (1994) definition of 'conceptions' as 'ways of experiencing'. For him, there might be a contradiction between a phenomenographer's interpretations of their participants' accounts of a particular phenomenon and the participants' actual experiences of that phenomenon. Säljö (1997) addresses this problem, and declares that:

It is doubtful if and in what sense the interview data generated in much of the empirical work within this tradition can be assumed to refer to ‘ways of experiencing’, the core object of research in phenomenography (Säljö, 1997: 173).

Therefore, Säljö (1997: 173) suggests that the data collected from the participants should be treated as ‘indicative of *accounting practices*-ways of talking and reasoning’, given that ‘accounting practices’ are public and accessible (author’s italics). In response to this theoretical problem, Smith (2006: 6) contends that entering into the ‘lifeworld’ of each participant can be obtained when a researcher creates ‘individual profiles of each participant’, which can lead to the ‘development of empathy’ before moving in to focus on comparative experience. Following Smith’s (2006) piece of advice, a multiple individual case study design was adopted in the present research, with the aim of entering into the lifeworlds of the participants and capturing a contextualised and flexible picture of their strategic language learning efforts over a time span of eighteen months in the UK (see Chapter 4). Along with supplementary methods (e.g. learner diaries, email correspondence and written narrative), thirteen to fifteen in-depth interviews were conducted with each participant of this study, and the researcher kept checking during the interviews his participants’ answers obtained from the previous interviews. Furthermore, Adawi et al.’s (2002: 86-87) ‘process of reflexivity’ or ‘selective bracketing’ described in Section 3.2.2.3 was advocated. This point will be further explained in Chapter 4.

3.7 Rigour of the Research: Validation and Reliability Issues

Orgill (2012: 2610) suggests that there have also been questions about the validity and reliability of phenomenographic studies, as shown in the following sections.

3.7.1 Validity Checks: Communicative and Pragmatic Validity

‘Validity’ signifies how well a study investigates what it intends to investigate or ‘the degree to which the research findings actually reflect the phenomenon being studied’ (Åkerlind, 2012: 123). Cope (2004: 8) argues that the validity issue in phenomenographic studies is ‘a contentious issue that is argued theoretically in the phenomenographic literature with no clear resolution’. Likewise, Bowden (2000: 1) notes that phenomenographic studies have often been criticised to their ‘perceived lack of validity’. However, there are two kinds of validity checks, termed communicative and pragmatic validity, which are often practised within phenomenographic research.

3.7.1.1 Communicative Validity

‘Communicative validity checks’ are based on ‘the persuasiveness of researchers regarding the appropriateness of their research methods and final interpretations as judged by the relevant research community’ (Van Rossum and Hamer, 2010: 47). That is, phenomenographers need to justify and defend the research methods and result findings in their studies by having an open dialogue with the participants themselves, other members of the professional community and the audience for the research outcomes. Åkerlind (2012: 124) claims, however, that although it is participants who have experienced the phenomenon of interest, validating the data of phenomenographic research from the participants’ feedback might be an inappropriate check of validity. This is because each individual holds a merely partial awareness of a particular phenomenon, and the same phenomenon is often approached differently by a particular group of individuals. Accordingly, asking the participants to evaluate the outcome space, which represents a collective interpretation of all interview

transcripts, might be questionable because an individual's experience or understanding cannot capture the full range of experiencing the phenomenon of interest (ibid). Bowden (2000: 1) further points out that adopting the same set of categories of description that had already been discovered by other researchers seems unreasonable, because it might be an indication of 'researcher bias' and the 'denial of the voice of the individual[s]'.

3.7.1.2 Pragmatic Validity

Another aspect of qualitative research validity is that of 'pragmatic validity checks', which involve 'testing knowledge produced in action' (Sandberg, 2005: 56) with the purpose of exploring the extent to which the results of a phenomenographic study are 'useful and meaningful to the intended audience' (Orgill, 2012: 2610). In essence, the insights gained from research findings are pragmatically valid if they give valuable knowledge that can be employed by the intended audience. In addressing this kind of research validity, Van Rossum and Hamer (2010: 45) proclaim that pragmatic validity is best adopted in phenomenographic studies, principally in those developed in the field of higher education. To justify their claim, Van Rossum and Hamer (2010: 46) mention that phenomenography originated from a series of empirical studies that aimed to enrich pedagogy by understanding learners' different ways of experiencing learning (e.g. Marton and Säljö, 1976; Marton, 1981, 1986). As a result, Entwistle (1997: 129) emphasises that '[F]or researchers in higher education, however, the test is generally not [phenomenography's] theoretical purity, but its value in producing useful insights into teaching and learning'.

Since pragmatic validity occupies a central place in the validity of this research study, developmental phenomenography rather than pure phenomenography is undertaken in the

present study. This is because developmental phenomenography has ‘a didactic purpose’, whereby the findings of a developmental phenomenographic study should be applicable and fruitful to the participants of a study or to others with a similar educational background, by encouraging them ‘to learn and to expand their thinking’ (Paakkari, 2012: 28). Conversely, the aim of a pure phenomenographic study is confined to elucidating the different possible conceptions of the ‘phenomena confronted by subjects in everyday life rather than in course material studied in school’ (Marton, 1986: 34). That is, this kind of phenomenography, as Paakkari (2012: 24) suggests, has primarily a descriptive rather than a pedagogical orientation.

3.7.2 Reliability Checks: Dialogic Reliability and Interpretative Awareness

Booth (1992: 64) suggests that the term ‘reliability’ is largely used in quantitative research to refer to the replicability of results, in the sense that ‘if another researcher repeated the research project...what is the probability that he or she would arrive at the same results’. In other words, reliability in social science is based on the assumption that there is a single reality, and that the findings can be replicated if the same data is utilised by another researcher (Sandberg, 1997: 204; Sin, 2010: 310). However, Cope (2004: 9) notes the concept of reliability as replicability seems to be inappropriate to being implemented in phenomenographic studies because of the difficulty of having different researchers reach the same outcome space. As repeatedly mentioned, individuals’ conceptions, which are the core of phenomenography, are context-sensitive and are in flux. Nonetheless, Åkerlind (2012: 125) differentiates two forms of reliability that are usually practised by phenomenographers to establish the reliability of their results. These forms will be discussed in the forthcoming sections.

3.7.2.1 Dialogic Reliability Check

‘Dialogic reliability’ is not common in phenomenographic research (Van Rossum and Hamer, 2010: 50), and implies that two or more researchers ‘discuss both the data and research results, coming to a common understanding of the former and an agreement about the latter’ (Orgill, 2012: 2611). In order to explain the process of implementation of dialogic reliability in a phenomenographic study, Collier-Reed et al. (2009: 10) referred to Bowden and his research group’s (2000) investigations into some learners’ experiences and understanding of some central concepts in physics using the dialogic reliability in their phenomenographic study. Collier-Reed et al. (2009) declare that

Bowden’s approach to analysis is to assign one member of his research team the responsibility of constituting draft categories of description, then having the other researchers re-read the transcripts, and independently make tentative allocations of each transcript to the categories. The allocations are compared and ‘where there were disagreements about categories of description or allocation of transcripts, they were resolved with reference to the transcripts as the only evidence of students’ understandings’ (p.52)... by making use of a group iterative approach to the analysis of phenomenographic data, new insights to the constitution of the categories of description can be achieved (Collier-Reed et al., 2009: 10).

In this sense, a dialogic reliability check entails that two or more researchers categorise the data, and discuss and review their own categorisation of description until agreement is reached. This measure of reliability might not play a central role in the present study, because it is carried out by one researcher.

3.7.2.2 Reliability as the Researcher's Interpretative Awareness

Sandberg (1997; 2005) recommends another form of reliability be implemented in phenomenographic studies, namely 'the researcher's interpretive awareness'. According to Sandberg (2005: 59), 'reliability as interpretative awareness' is to 'acknowledge and explicitly deal with our [phenomenographers] subjectivity throughout the research process instead of overlooking it'. That is, a phenomenographer should clarify their interpretative procedures throughout the research process to the intended audience, including 'formulating the research question, selecting individuals to be studied, obtaining data from those individuals, analysing the data obtained, and reporting the results' (Sandberg, 1997: 209). Åkerlind (2012: 125) and Orgill (2012: 2611) note that reliability as an 'interpretative awareness' pertains to the act of 'bracketing' or 'epoché', suggesting that the phenomenographer should pinpoint their previous conceptual understanding of the phenomenon under study, and describe how they check and control all stages of the interpretation processes of the study (for more explanation about the act of 'bracketing', see Section 3.3.3.3, Chapter 3).

Cope (2004: 8-9) further outlines some principles that should be followed in a phenomenographic study in order to increase the interpretive awareness of a phenomenographic researcher. These principles, which are also used in the present study, are as follows:

- the researcher's own background and understanding of the phenomenon under investigation should be identified;
- the characteristics of the research participants and the design of interview questions should be clearly stated and justified;

- the stages endorsed in collecting data should be transparent;
- the data analysis methods should be conducted ‘with an open mind rather than imposing an existing structure’;
- the procedures for arriving at categories of description should be completely explained and illustrated with quotes; and
- the results should be presented in a manner that allows for scrutiny.

As a result, reliability in this study is not essentially concerned with the replicability of results, but rather, with the employment of thorough and appropriate methodological procedures in order to achieve faithful interpretations of my participants’ language learning experiences and their strategy use before and after their coming to the UK. This idea will be further explained in Chapter 4.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has argued for the appropriateness of utilising phenomenography as a methodological framework in order to answer the research questions of the present study. Tracing the development of phenomenography and its theoretical assumptions has revealed that there are two important assumptions that distinguish this methodology. First, a phenomenographic study should be carried out by considering second-order descriptions (i.e. learners’ own accounts of their experiences) and second, that a phenomenographer needs to consider aspects of a concept that a learner focuses on which involves attempting to ‘bracket’ their pre-conceived notions and judgments as much as they can. After this, the fundamental strengths and weaknesses of phenomenography and the rationale for adopting

phenomenography in the current study were tackled in this chapter. The next chapter will deal with the research methods used in the present study, the selection of the participants and the methods of data collection and the steps taken when analysing that data, as well as related ethical issues.

CHAPTER 4 RESEARCH DESIGN

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter focused on the appropriateness of using phenomenography as a methodological framework in order to address the research questions of this study. This research is concerned to uncover an awareness of the construct of LLS and variations in this in a group of Arab learners studying in the UK, underlying their past English learning experiences and the ongoing interactions between learner agency and contextual conditions. This chapter will present and discuss the research design of the study. A research design may be thought of as ‘the glue that holds [the elements of] the research project together’ such as the samples, measures, treatments...etc. (Trochim, 2006: 1). In other words, it is the basic research plan that guides the data collection and analysis phases of the research project.

This chapter describes selection of the participants and setting. It also deals with the methods deployed to gather the data for the research. This research uses a variety of research methods, including semi-structured interviews, learner diaries, language learning histories (LLHs), observation and email exchange, so that rich data can be attained to achieve a holistic portrait of the participants’ strategic learning efforts. The last part of this chapter discusses the ethical issues related to the study.

4.2 Research Participants and Educational Context of the Study

4.2.1 Selection and Characteristics of the Participants

Patton (2002: 230) points out that qualitative research studies largely rely on ‘relatively small samples...selected purposefully’ in order to gain ‘insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations’. As discussed in Chapter 3 (Section 3.3.3.3), ‘a purposeful sampling strategy’ is seen as the fundamental criterion for choosing the participants in phenomenographic studies, in the sense that the sample should be capable of describing the phenomenon under investigation in a range of qualitatively varying ways (Boon et al., 2007: 210; Paakkari, 2012: 40). Therefore, Patton (2002: 243) argues that a purposeful sampling approach, which was deployed in the present study, could also be called ‘maximum variation sampling’, because it signifies ‘purposefully picking a wide range of cases to get variation on dimensions of interests’ (Patton, 2002: 243). With this in mind, adopting this type of sampling in my study was essential to capture the maximum variation from the experiences of ‘critical cases’ (Collier-Reed, 2006: 47) about the given phenomenon i.e. understanding the different strategic English learning approaches used by a group of newly-arrived postgraduate learners from an Arab background studying at an English medium university in the UK.

In selecting the participants for the study, the following sampling criteria were adopted: first of all, all participants had to be native speakers of Arabic, having planned to pursue their postgraduate studies at a UK University. Secondly, none of them should have lived outside the Arab region before arrival in the UK, in order to attain a greater chance of capturing their linguistic and non-linguistic challenges in the UK (i.e. how to gain a foothold in a desirable community). A third criterion for participant selection was that all of them had the intention of undertaking the pre-sessional English for academic purposes course which was run by the UK University at which they planned to pursue their higher studies before joining their Master’s programmes. This criterion was a response to a claim suggested by Benson et al. (2013: 4-5) that a handful of empirical studies have been underpinned by the ‘social turn’ in

language education, and aimed to uncover the influences of short academic programmes in a study abroad context on international students' language achievement and identity improvement. Therefore, this longitudinal qualitative study is unique, in that it includes both short and long academic programmes.

A final criterion for participant selection was that the participants had to be of different genders and disciplinary backgrounds, and should have come from different Arab countries. This is because the pivotal role of learners' past English learning experiences and contextual realities (e.g. social and material resources and learning motivations) was emphasised in the present study, and underpinned by a sociocultural standpoint. The participants were given pseudonyms, and their profiles are provided in the following table:

Table 5: Demographic data of the participants

Name	gender	age	nationality	educational background	social background	Source of financial support
Nasser	Male	23	Saudi	BA in Industrial Engineering	middle class	Government-sponsored
Khaled	Male	25	Saudi	BA in Industrial Engineering	upper-middle class	Government-sponsored
Fadi	Male	24	Syrian	BA in Dentistry	upper-middle class	Family-sponsored
Jamal	Male	27	Libyan	BA in English literature	middle class	Government-sponsored
Yazn	Male	22	Jordanian	BA in Business and Management	upper-middle class	Family-sponsored
Rama	Female	23	Syrian	BA in Agricultural Engineering	lower class	Government-sponsored

Zainab	Female	25	Iraqi	BA in Business and Management	upper-middle class	Government-sponsored
Mouza	Female	25	Emirati	BA in Gynecology	middle class	Government-sponsored

As shown in the above table, eight case study learners' language learning experiences were investigated in the current study; five males and three females. The participants came from the following Arab countries (Emirates, Iraq, Libya, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Syria), and their age range was between 23 and 27 years. Moreover, all of them were unknown to the researcher before the data collection stage. They came to pursue their postgraduate studies in the UK in the same area as their undergraduate specialisation. The overwhelming majority of Arabs who complete their higher studies abroad are 'elite' learners in terms of academic achievement, in particular those who come to the UK on scholarships (Alabbad and Gitsaki, 2011: 3). Furthermore, most of these learners come from well-off and/or highly-educated urban families (ibid). The vignettes of each participant's biography, based on their short written accounts of their past English learning experiences, will be presented in Chapter 6.

4.2.2 Contacting the Research Participants

I gained initial access to the Arab participants of this research via the help of the director of the pre-session English course run by the university where the research took place. One month before the beginning of the pre-session English course (i.e. on 2 June 2012), I met the director of that course. During this meeting, I elucidated the nature and goals of my study, and the target learners that I needed in order to answer my research questions. He expressed his readiness to assist in contacting Arab learners who would attend the specified course.

When the course started on 4 July 2012, the Director arranged a meeting between the Arab learners who were attending the pre-sessional English course and myself on 7 July 2012. I introduced myself to the group as a whole, and then went around to each person and shook them by the hand. In order to build a positive relationship of trust with the attendees, I provided as much verified information about myself, using our shared language of Arabic. For example, I talked about my overseas language learning experiences along with displaying my portfolio link on the departmental university website. During the meeting, I sought to explain in simple terms the significance and the purpose of my research (i.e. exploring the challenges that newly-arrived postgraduate students usually confront while studying at an English medium university and the strategies that they often utilise to deal with these challenges).

Following Sonali's (2006: 211) advice, I made sure that there were mutual benefits to those who would participate in my study, by offering extra help to them, such as proofreading their essays. Nine out of twelve Arab learners showed an interest in participating in the study. At the end of the meeting, I obtained basic personal information concerning the nine participants (i.e. name, nationality, e-mail address and mobile number). The day after this meeting, I sent an email to the participants including two copies written in Arabic and English about the aim of my study, their own rights and the requirements for their participation in the study. After two months of data collection, one of the participants apologised and withdrew from the study. His decision was respected. Therefore, only the data collected from the eight participants outlined in Table 5 were considered in this research. During the process of collecting data, most of the time I checked with the participants regarding a suitable date and time for the next interview or for sending their essays and diary entries, through mobile calls and text messages.

4.2.3 Institutional Context of the Study

The university in this study is a UK institution which gained university status in 1965. It is one of the most internationalised universities in the UK, and English is assumed to be the medium of instruction and avenue for pursuing academic studies. The university comprises twenty-nine academic departments and over fifty research centres and institutes, in four faculties: Arts, Medicine, Science and Social Sciences. In October 2013, the student population was over 23,000 of which 9,775 were postgraduate students. Approximately a third of the student body came from overseas and over 120 countries are represented on the campus. Campus and student halls offer a wide variety of social, cultural, and sports activities, aiming to bring hall residents together for unique experiences of collective life.

4.2.3.1 Pre-sessional English for Academic Purposes Course

As already stated, all participants undertook the pre-sessional English course which was run by the UK University at which they planned to pursue their higher studies. This course was based on a communicative approach and active participation. It was divided into two five-week phases. The first phase was called ‘English for General Academic Purposes’ because it provided a broad focus on all language skills for academic purposes (i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing), along with some skills that the learners could make use of later in their MA courses, such as avoiding plagiarism, using dictionaries and using references. The second phase, however, was called ‘English for Specific Academic Purposes’ because it gave specific attention to the learners’ needs for their future MA course and their subject-specific reading. The majority of the learners doing the pre-sessional course were postgraduates, and like the tutors, they came from a wide range of backgrounds and many different countries.

The students were divided into nine groups, and for each group there were two academic tutors. The first concentrated on helping students improve their skills in reading and writing for academic studies. These classes were called Text-based Study (TBS) classes. Students had to present a fully researched written project in the second phase of the course, and their project marks were included in the end of course assessment. The second academic tutor was responsible for helping students to speak clearly and listen effectively (Handbook of Pre-sessional English Course, 2012). A full report which assessed the learner's skills was to be sent to their department at the end of this course. The attendance of Rama and Zainab at this course was obligatory, so as to gain an unconditional offer for their MA programmes.

4.3 A Multiple Case Study Design

Gaining a holistic understanding of the phenomenon under research required entering into 'the life-worlds' of the research participants and an in-depth engagement with them (Smith, 2006: 6). Therefore, a multiple case study design was adopted in this research, as will be explained in the forthcoming subsections.

4.3.1 Case Study: Definitions and Types

A case study is defined as 'the in-depth study of instances of a phenomenon in its natural context and from the perspective of the participants involved in the phenomenon' (Gall et al., 2003: 436). Stake (2008:118) in turn argues that '[A]s a form of research, case study is defined by interest in an individual case, not by the methods of inquiry used'. A 'case' might be quite simple (e.g. a child, an adult, a learner, a person's experience or phase in life) or complex/collective (e.g. institution, campaign, region or neighbourhood) (Yin, 2014: 15).

As regards the types of case study, Stake (2008: 121-124) differentiates three main types of case study, in accordance with the researcher's interest in the case. These types are (1) intrinsic (2) instrumental and (3) collective or multiple.

- *An intrinsic case study* is used when the researcher seeks to obtain a deeper understanding of the case itself (e.g. child, specific group, curriculum, or organisation), by examining 'its particularity and ordinariness' (Stake, 2008: 122).
- *An instrumental case study* is used to afford insights into an issue or phenomenon: 'The case is often looked at in depth, its contexts scrutinised, its ordinary activities detailed because it helps us pursue the external interest' (Stake, 2005: 445). In this respect, the case plays only a supportive role through facilitating our understanding of something else. In order to answer a research question, for instance, one might need to study a particular case to understand a given phenomenon.
- *A multiple or collective case study* is an instrumental case study with a number of cases undertaken in order to explore a certain phenomenon (Stake, 2008: 123). According to Shkedi (2005: 21), although this type of case study presents the cases collectively, 'each single case study is portrayed with its unique features and context'. Shkedi (2005:21) further postulates that an instrumental multiple case study yields 'thick descriptions' of different perspectives about a particular phenomenon through investigating both similarities and differences among the cases' characteristics to capture an in-depth understanding of the given phenomenon.

Yin (2003: 5-40) in turn identifies three different types of case study (exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory), in accordance with its purpose and the kind of study question(s):

- *An exploratory case study* seeks to investigate a specific phenomenon which is inseparable from the context in which it exists from multiple perspectives (Yin, 2003: 5-6). Here, the researcher has only a little knowledge about the phenomenon under study. This kind of study is suitable for addressing ‘what’, ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions.
- *A descriptive case study* is designed to accurately describe the phenomenon or situation in the context in which it occurs. In this case, a substantial amount of knowledge about the phenomenon of interest should already exist. This kind of study will answer ‘who’, ‘when’ and ‘where’ questions (ibid: 36).
- *An explanatory or casual case study* aims to link an event with its effects and is appropriate in investigating causality (i.e. cause-effect relationships) (ibid: 23). It not only describes the phenomenon under investigation, but extends to the fact that it ‘explains why or how the phenomenon being studied is happening’ (Hoque, 2006: 364). Explanatory case studies usually answer ‘why’ questions. The following table summarises the main kinds of case study:

Table 6: Types of case study

Criteria	Types of case study	
The researcher’s interest	Intrinsic	exploring the uniqueness of the case itself
	Instrumental	developing theories and/or gaining insights
	Collective	more than one instrumental case
The purpose of case	Exploratory	discovering new insights about the phenomenon
	Descriptive	describing events as they are seen
	Explanatory	reflecting on the cause-effect relationship
Number	Single	one case
	Multiple	more than one case

4.3.2 Adopting a Qualitative, Exploratory Instrumental Multiple Case Study in the Current Research

With regard to the above discussion, an exploratory, instrumental multiple case study was adopted in the present research, given that this research was aiming to go beyond the previous focus on strategy-counting questionnaire results (i.e. generalisation), which dominates the bulk of LLS research, to specificity and authenticity (e.g. case studies), which treats LLSs as dynamic and context-dependent. This kind of case study also resonates with the theoretical underpinnings of phenomenography, which aims to disclose in depth the similarities and variations in relation to the way a group of individuals perceive the same phenomenon, and in relation to how they interact with their situated learning environments. More specifically, using this kind of case study in the present research can help the researcher to enter into the lifeworlds of the participants, to discover not only how each participant acts agentively to accomplish (or fail to accomplish) their learning goals, but also how the same phenomenon (i.e. pursuing academic studies in English-medium universities abroad) may be conceived of differently by different participants and sometimes by the same participant in response to changing goals and contextual realities.

In this respect, a qualitative multiple case study method is essential in delineating the multiple perspectives of language learners' everyday situated learning practices, which is also the aim of phenomenography (Åkerlind, 2012) and appears complex for the survey. According to Stake (2006: 52), the researcher should select four to ten cases in a multiple case study design. Therefore, I decided to focus on eight cases after discussing this issue with my supervisor.

4.3.3 Strengths and Weaknesses of Case Study with Suggested Solutions

In addressing the value of utilising case studies as a research strategy, some researchers (e.g. Simons, 2009; Stake, 2005; Suryani, 2008; Yin, 2014) have outlined the following strengths:

- Case study is ‘flexible’ because it is ‘neither time-dependent nor constrained by method’ (Simons, 2009: 23). That is, it may be carried out in a few days or might last several months depending on the timescale of the study. Additionally, a variety of methods can be used to understand the case.
- The results of case studies can afford ‘naturalistic generalizations from personal or vicarious experience’ (Stake, 2005: 454). In other words, individuals can share and understand others’ social experience.
- Case study provides an in-depth explanation of the perceptions of the same phenomenon (Suryani, 2008: 120).
- Case study is often less costly than surveys (Suryani, 2008: 121).

However, there are some criticisms associated with the use of a case study. One of these criticisms is its lack of capacity for generalising the research findings because researchers, especially those using an individual case, tend to have limited evidence, in contrast to quantitative research (Flyvbjerg, 2011: 302). In responding to this issue, Yin (2009) makes it clear that

the case study, like the experiment, does not represent a ‘sample’, and in doing a case study, your goal will be to expand and generalize theories (analytic generalization) and not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalization)’ (Yin, 2009: 15).

Yin (2014: 57-59) elsewhere elaborates on this point, suggesting that a multiple case design follows a ‘replication’ logic rather than the ‘sampling’ logic, which is characteristic of survey

research. In other words, the aim is not to select cases typical of a larger sample or population, but to unearth the uniqueness of each case and then determine the similarities and variations across the cases underpinned by a theoretical framework (ibid: 59). Thus, the research findings of different cases can work together to enhance the trustworthiness of the research study. Related to this, the selection of each case should be made in accordance with the research purpose, questions and theoretical context (ibid). This point was discussed in the previous section.

Another criticism of the case study method pertains to its subjectivity, using subjective data such as individual, in-depth interviews and focus groups (Suryani, 2008: 121). Therefore, Stake (2008: 133) recommends that researchers use triangulating methods in order to increase the objectivity of data. In this respect, the researcher of the present study used some secondary methods (e.g. learner diaries and essays) basically to help him construct the interview questions and verify the results gained from these methods with those from the main method i.e. individual, semi-structured interviews.

4.4 An Overview of the Stages of Data Collection

This longitudinal qualitative research study has adopted a sociocultural theoretical framework to capture the dynamism of the strategic learning efforts of a group of Arab university learners from the date of their arrival in the UK up to the end of their Master's degree courses, including their previous language learning experiences in their homelands, changing learning motivations and identity development. In addressing this inquiry, the study consisted of four stages:

- **Stage one (9-27 July 2012)**: This stage aimed to understand the eight participants' developmental processing of their language learning experiences and the particular patterns of LLSs that they had deployed in their homelands. It further served as a baseline for comparison with the other three stages, which examined these participants' LLS use after coming to the UK. At this stage, the participants were asked to write an essay about their past English language experiences in their homelands, and then four individual semi-structured interviews were conducted.
- **Stage two (9 July-24 September 2012)**: This stage focused on the participants' academic and sociocultural challenges that they expected to confront from the moment of their arrival in the UK to the end of the pre-sessional English course (i.e. the first three months of their stay in the UK), and the LLSs they espoused to tackle any problems. Different methods were used in this stage, including learner diaries, two classroom observations, email exchanges and three to four in-depth interviews.
- **Stage three (1 October 2012-28 April 2013)**: The focus of this research stage was on the participants' language learning experiences, particularly in terms of their strategy use and motivational discourses, in the first and second terms of their MA programmes. It constituted a critical part of the study, because the main reason for the participants' coming to the UK was to attain academic qualifications through the medium of English. At this stage, the participants were first asked to write an essay, describing the challenges that they were facing in their MA courses, including their motivations and strategy use. Then, four in-depth interviews were conducted.

- **Stage four (15 May 2012-28 November 2013)**: This research stage focused on the participants' experiences in writing their MA dissertations and their extramural activities across different settings on the UK. For this purpose, two to three in-depth interviews were carried out.

Together, these stages were able to depict the ongoing interplay between the participants' human agency and a host of contextual realities during the attempts to accomplish their future goals and desired identity. The following Table outlines the four stages of data collection:

Table 7 : Research Stages

Stages of data collection in the UK	Purpose	Methods used	Number of participants
1 st stage: baseline (9-27 July 2012)	Exploring the participants' past language experiences and their strategy use in their homeland	Writing an essay and four in-depth, semi-structured interviews	8
2 nd stage: pre-sessional course (9 July-24 September 2012)	Capturing the participants' strategic efforts to manage possible linguistic and sociocultural challenges inside and outside the classroom.	Learner diaries, email exchanges, two classroom observations, and three to four in-depth interviews	8
3 rd stage: the first and second semesters of their Master's studies (1 October 2012-28 April 2013)	Understanding the participants' developing LLS use and their identity development in the first two terms of their MA programmes.	a short written account, email exchanges, and four in-depth interviews	8

4 th stage: last semester of their Master's degree courses (15 May -28 November 2013)	Gaining important insights into the participants' strategic efforts while writing their Master's dissertations	Two to three in-depth interviews and email exchanges	8
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4.5 Research Methods

Stokes (2011: 25) points out that although in-depth individual interviews are considered to be the 'ideal' method of data collection in phenomenographic research, other methods can also be implemented in carrying out a phenomenographic study, such as focus groups, drawings and written text (e.g. essays and historical documents). In the present study underpinned by phenomenography as a methodological framework, a variety of methods were adopted to collect data, including semi-structured interviews, learner diaries, language learning histories (LLHs), observation and email exchange. They are the focus of the following sections.

4.5.1 Phenomenographic, In-depth, Semi-structured Interviews

In the present study, an individual semi-structured interview, which is the preferred method in phenomenographic studies, was selected as the main method of data collection. In fact, the nature of phenomenographic interviews was discussed in depth in Chapter 3 (Section 3.3.3.1). The salient assumptions of phenomenographic interviews can be summarised as follows:

- They focus on how the phenomenon appears to the participant, rather than on any pre-conceptions held by the interviewer. (Cope, 2004: 6)

- They are ‘more dialogic in nature’ (Felix, 2009: 147), which implies that there should be ‘a shared or joint topic’ between the researcher and their participants (Bowden, 1996: 58).
- They include a few open-ended questions because most interview questions should be developed from the participants’ accounts of their own experiences about a given phenomenon (Collier-Reed et al., 2009: 348). As Barkhuizen et al. (2014: 17) argue, the questions in semi-structured interviews are ‘usually open-ended to allow participants to elaborate on and researchers to pursue developing themes’.

Therefore, I used follow-up questions throughout the interview process to illuminate meaning, develop my understanding of what each participant said and to seek examples from their experience of the phenomenon under investigation (i.e. study abroad experience). All interviews were audio recorded. Each interview schedule with my participants was based on their prior interview transcript(s) along with the data collected from other supplementary methods such as learner diaries and LLHs (to see a sample of the interview schedule of each research stage, see Appendix 3). In doing so, the probability of imposing my agenda on my participants was lessened in that principally this research was underpinned by a second-order perspective and emphasised the potential of bracketing (i.e. setting aside) my pre-conceived notions and judgments as much as was possible (for more elaboration, see Section 3.3.3.3, Chapter 3).

After completing the consent forms (see Appendix 4), each participant was invited to have thirteen to fifteen in-depth, one-to-one interviews at different stages of their sojourn in the UK. The interviews were held in different quiet places near the campus because six participants were living on campus. I tried to create a relaxed atmosphere and to be a good listener by using verbal and nonverbal clues such as nodding my head, smiling and making use of simple statements (e.g. yes and interesting). Moreover, all interviews were conducted in the participants’ language of choice. While Zainab (the Iraqi participant) chose English, all

other interviews were conducted in Arabic, in order to help the participants to express their ideas more deeply and freely. The exact examples of the interview transcripts are given in the findings chapters (i.e. Chapters 6 and 7). The interview schedules and length of interview time for each research stage was as below.

Table 8: The interview schedules and length of interviewing time

Research Stages	Participants	1 st interview	2 nd interview	3 rd interview	4 th interview	Total duration
First stage (language learning experiences in homelands)	Zainab	12-07-'12	16-07-'12	22-07-'12	27-07-'12	5:06:08
	Fadi	13-07-'12	16-07-'12	20-07-'12	27-07-'12	5:29:15
	Yazn	10-07-'12	14-07-'12	20-07-'12	24-07-'12	5:10:22
	Nasser	11-07-'12	14-07-'12	21-07-'12	26-07-'12	5:33:38
	Khaled	12-07-'12	15-07-'12	21-07-'12	27-07-'12	4:49:17
	Jamal	12-07-'10	16-07-'12	20-07-'12	28-07-'12	4:26:44
	Mouza	13-07-'12	17-07-'12	21-07-'12	29-07-'12	4:10:37
	Rama	11-07-'12	15-07-'12	22-07-'12	28-07-'12	5:41:10
Second stage (pre-sessional course)	participants	1 st interview	2 nd interview	3 rd interview	4 th interview	Total duration
	Zainab	25-07-'12	12-08-'12	31-08-'12	25-09-'12	3:13:01
	Fadi	24-07-'12	14-08-'12	31-08-'12	28-09-'12	3:28:11
	Yazn	24-07-'12	17-08-'12	30-08-'12	24-09-'12	4:03:25
	Nasser	24-07-'12	11-08-'12	29-08-'12	28-09-'12	3:12:44
	Khaled	24-07-'12	11-08-'12	28-08-'12	25-09-'12	3:42:49
	Jamal	25-07-'12	15-08-'12	17-09-12	-----	3:02:13
	Mouza	25-07-'12	17-08-'12	16-09-'12	-----	2:41:36
	Rama	30-07-'12	16-08-'12	25-09-'12	-----	3:01:10
Third stage (First and Second)	Participants	1 st interview	2 nd interview	3 rd interview	4 th interview	Total duration
	Zainab	01-11-'12	14-12-'12	02-02-'13	24-04-'13	6:06:08

Semesters of Master's Programmes)	Fadi	01-11-'12	12-12-'12	11-02-'13	22-04-'13	5:02:11
	Yazn	02-11-'12	11-12-'12	11-02-'13	22-04-'13	6:00:27
	Nasser	02-11-'12	24-12-'12	10-02-'13	11-04-'13	6:27:58
	Khaled	05-11-'12	27-12-'12	13-02-'13	27-04-'13	6:41:22
	Jamal	06-11-'12	29-12-'12	16-02-'13	11-04-'13	4:18:12
	Mouza	02-11-'12	21-12-'12	25-02-'13	01-04-'13	4:12:01
	Rama	04-11-'12	25-12-'12	01-02-'13	28-04-'13	5:33:09
Fourth stage	participants	1 st interview	2 nd interview	3 rd interview	Total duration	
(last semester of Master's programmes)	Zainab	12-06-'13	30-08-'13	29-11-'13	3:16:08	
	Fadi	10-10-'13	21-11-'13	-----	1:30:20	
	Yazn	11-06-'13	13-08-'13	27-10-'13	3:18:03	
	Nasser	13-06-'13	11-08-'13	10-11-'13	2:47:54	
	Khaled	15-06-'13	30-08-'13	14-11-'13	3:12:42	
	Jamal	12-06-'13	22-08-'13	-----	2:09:03	
	Mouza	18-06-'13	21-08-'13	12-11-'13	2:44:33	
	Rama	10-06-'13	18-08-'13	28-11-'13	3:02:33	

With regard to the above table, the interview data collected during the study may be summarised as follows:

Table 9: Summary of interview data

Participants	Total number of interviews	total duration
Zainab	Fifteen	17:31:25
Fadi	Fourteen	15:29:57
Yazn	Fifteen	18:31:77
Nasser	Fifteen	18:02:12
Khaled	Fifteen	18:26:10
Jamal	Thirteen	14:46:12

Mouza	Fourteen	13:48:47
Rama	Fifteen	16:48:28

4.5.2 Learner Diaries

According to Barkhuizen et al. (2014: 35), learner diaries are ‘autobiographical, introspective documents that record the experiences of language learning from the learner’s perspective...they consist of a series of entries written over an extended period of time’. This research method emphasises the fact that that ‘reality and meaning lie in the ways individuals experience their reality and reshape it through reflection’ (Porto, 2007: 676). This idea seems to align with the non-dualistic ontological position in phenomenography, which suggests that reality exists in the reciprocally intertwined relationship between individuals and their own world. Plana (2011: 174) further argues that diaries may play a central role in enabling language learners to become more aware of their own learning experiences and processes, both inside and outside the classroom. That is, diaries permit language learners to view themselves critically.

Barkhuizen et al. (2014: 35) note that diaries may have ‘a more specific focus too, such as writing about learning strategies and styles, learner emotions, or cross-cultural encounters’. Mori (2007: 84), however, suggests that diaries as a research tool have been differently used according to the research purpose and theoretical framework undertaken. For example, in the LLS studies underpinned by cognitivist theories (e.g. Bailey 1983; Carson and Longhini 2002; Cross, 2011), diaries have been extensively utilised to discover the LLSs that are frequently employed by the target learners and then correlate them with other variables such as learner motivation, gender, anxiety and academic major (Rao and Liu, 2011: 43). In this regard, Brown (1984: 125) states that diary study is ‘one of the best methods for getting at the

individual learner variables’. Conversely, Jang (2009: 59), in her seminal paper on the use of diaries from a sociocultural perspective, regards diaries as ‘a means that would contribute to this linkage between individual and context by understanding L2 learners as *people* who retain agency and live in particular contexts’ (author’s emphasis). Theorised as such, the use of diaries as a qualitative research method can contribute to exploring the participants’ identity construction, which is the outcome of the ongoing interaction between one’s agency and contextual conditions (e.g. material and social resources). This is one of the fundamental reasons for the use of learner diaries in the present study, given that this method fits both the theoretical and methodological approaches undertaken in the study. However, few sociocultural LLS studies have used participants’ diaries as one of the research methods (e.g. Gao, 2010b).

At the second stage of collecting data, the participants in this research were asked to keep a diary during their attendance on the pre-sessional course, which lasted ten weeks. They were encouraged to take timely notes about any critical incidents that brought them into contact with the English language both inside and outside the classroom, including their thoughts and feelings. The following table indicates the learner diary entries collected during this period.

Table 10: Learner diary entries

Participant	July 2012	August 2012	September 2012	Total
Zainab	13,14,15,16,17,18,20, 21,22, 23, 24,27,28,30	1,2,3,4,5,6,8,10,11,14, 15,17,18,19,23,24,25	1,2,3,5,8,9,10,11 ,13,14	41
Yazn	12,17,18,19,20,23,27, 29	2,3,4,5,6,10,13,14,16,18,19, 22,23,27,30	2,4,6,7,9,11,12	31
Fadi	15,16,17,18,20,22,24, 25,26,27,28,30	1,7,9,18,22,23,25,28,29,30, 31	1,6,9,10,11,13	29

Khaled	14,15,16,17,18,19,21, 23,25,28,30	1,2,4,7,8,18,21,23,29,30	1,2,4,6,7,9,10	28
Nasser	14,15,16,18,19,20,22, 24,25,29	4,5,7,9,11,13,21,23,25,29,30 ,31	3,7,9,14	26
Rama	12,13,14,17,18,26,27, 28,29,30	2,3,5,8,15,17,21,22	1,2,3,8,11	23
Mouza	13,15,17,20,22,28,29	2,3,5,6,9	2,6,9	15
Jamal	15,17,19,20,27	3,4,8,14,19,20	-----	11

However, Macaro (2001: 45) notes that participants might forget to write some valuable pieces of information, or might refer to events that are unrelated to the phenomenon under investigation. As Cohen (2011: 87) argues, one of the weaknesses of using diaries in LLS research is that ‘many learners may not even mention their strategy use at all’. Graham (1997: 195) has therefore suggested a solution to this problem by providing students with some broad headings under which to write their diary entries. In effect, I adopted Graham’s (1997: 195) guideline for diary writing in my research, by giving the participants a pack of cards on which to record their everyday English learning activities. Each card included the following information:

1	Date:
2	Activity and situation (in class/outside class):
3	Things I found easy/things I found difficult:
4	How I dealt with the task:
5	What have I learned/what have I achieved?:
6	How do I feel?:
7	What should I do now?:

Along with producing rich information about the participants' awareness of the needs of the new context and their shifting strategy use, the use of learner diaries as a research method aimed to contextualise and construct the interview questions of the study, given that the semi-structured interview method was the main research tool in the present study.

The participants were expected to return their diaries to me by email or by handing them over to me one or two days before each interview. Each time I received the participants' diaries, I noted my own reflections in a notebook for future analysis. Furthermore, the choice of language for writing the diaries was left to the participants. Apart from Zainab, the participants used Arabic in their diaries. By looking at Table 10, two points may be noted. The first is that the participants' diary entries in the first month of their stay in the UK were the longest. This might reveal their strenuous attempts to adapt to the new context. The second is that two participants (Jamal and Mouza) were less conscientious than other participants in writing their learning diaries, partially because they were married and had family responsibilities.

It is worth noting that in my initial research plan, I wanted my participants to continue writing their diaries after the start of their Master's programmes. However, most of them reported that they would not have been able to do so because of the anticipated pressure of study. Dörnyei (2007: 158) echoes this point, arguing that the limitation of a diary is that language learners need to be comfortable with writing it as 'it is very demanding on the part of the informant'. Therefore, I modified my plan for data collection by suggesting that they write a short essay about their learning experiences while attending their MA courses, as a supplementary method to interview data.

4.5.3 Language Learning Histories (LLHs)

Barkhuizen et al. (2014: 37) suggest that LLHs are retrospective written accounts of past language learning experience. The merit of using LLHs as a research method is that they can help researchers attain insights into their participants' 'private worlds, inaccessible to experimental methodologies, and thus provide the insider's view of the processes of language learning, attrition, and use' (Pavlenko, 2007: 164-165). Benson (2011b) further indicates that

the word history suggests a long-term account, although the periods of time covered by LLHs can vary greatly, ranging from the entire period over which a person has learned a language to much shorter periods, such as a year or semester of study or an incident that lasts no more than a few minutes (Benson, 2011b: 548).

In the present study, this research method was used in the first and third stages of data collection. Before conducting the first one-to-one interviews with each participant, I asked them to write an essay about themselves and some of their English learning experiences prior to their arrival in the UK. By doing this, the researcher may 'uncover the amount of investment they [the participants] are already making, or are prepared to make, in their language learning' (Flowerdew and Miller, 2008: 221). The participants were allowed to use the language with which they felt most comfortable. Apart from Fadi and Zainab, all other participants used Arabic to write their essays during the first stage of data collection. During their initial interviews, the participants were asked to elaborate on some of the points that they had already written about in their essays. This research method helped to construct the interview questions and to establish rapport with my participants.

As already mentioned, I resolved to use LLHs in the third stage of data collection (i.e. the first and second terms of MA programmes) in response to my participants' claim that writing their diaries would take up a considerable amount of their time. After one month from the start of their Master's programmes (i.e. on 27 October 2012), the participants were asked to

write an essay describing the updated challenges they had encountered on their MA courses, including their feelings and strategy use. I also indicated to them that they could choose their preferred language for this. Apart from Nasser, all other participants wrote their essays in English. This might be an indication of their increasing L2 linguistic confidence (Mercer, 2011). It is noteworthy that in order to help the participants frame their essays and facilitate their retrospective processing, they were given a set of questions in the first and third research stages and asked to answer as many questions as they liked in their essays:

Table 11: a set of questions for writing an essay

First research stage	Third research stage
1. Write general information about your background (e.g. your parents' job, the number of your brothers and sisters, your city/village...etc.)	1. When did you join your MA programme?
2. When did you start learning English?	2. What about your feelings and preparations for the MA programme?
3. What sort of problems did you usually have in learning English at that time?	3. Describe your MA course?
4. How did you sort them out at that time?	4. Any interesting events or people that either encourage or discourage you so far?
5. Were you satisfied with your English at that time?	5. Are you satisfied with your English level so far?
6. What are the areas that you still want to improve in?	6. What are significant differences that you noticed in learning English between home, pre-sessional course and here? (In terms of classroom, activities, learning resources, examination methods, learning environment).
7. What was your motivation for learning English at that time?	7. Have you found sufficient opportunities to practise your English inside and outside the classroom?
8. Did you receive enough help? From whom? How did they help you?	
N.P. you can add any other ideas	N.P. you can add any other ideas

4.5.4 Classroom Observation

Observation has a limited application to learning strategy research because a great number of LLSs are unobservable, and observers might be biased in what they look at (Cohen, 2011: 73; Oxford, 2011: 145). Moreover, this study has adopted phenomenography, which concerns itself with understanding the phenomenon under investigation from a second-order standpoint (i.e., from participants' viewpoints rather than researchers'). However, three participants (Nasser, Rama, and Zainab) asked me to attend their oral presentation in the second phase of the pre-session course, in order to give them my feedback about their performance. After getting oral permission from their pre-session tutors and the director of the course, I observed two classes, since Nasser and Zainab were in the same class. The merits of observation in this research were thus limited to developing rapport and empathy with the participants.

4.5.5 Email Correspondence

With the development of social networking, the internet has become a fundamental medium of text-based communication and has allowed researchers to use it for data collection, including email correspondences, online chatting and telephone calls (Silverman, 2013: 78). In this research, I used email correspondence to receive the participants' diaries before each interview was carried out in the second research stage, to arrange times for the meetings with them, to send the selected translated data to my participants to be verified and to make them comment on a few points that were mentioned in the interviews but needed further illustration. For example, Mouza, the Emirati participant, mentioned in one of her interviews that she used technologies in her homelands 'not only for learning English'. When I asked her

to clarify this point in one of our email exchanges, she wrote that ‘I mean in Emirates I used to book hotels online, send emails to my friends and purchase some beauty products and other items online too’ (on 24 Aug 2012). Seventy-five per cent of the email exchanges were written in English. Throughout my research, I saved all the email exchanges with my participants, and paid particular attention to those that were relevant to their strategic language learning effort.

4.6 Research Ethics

Written consent was provided by the participants prior to the research (see Appendix 4). As described in 4.2.2, I explained in the first meeting with my participants the purpose and duration of my research. I also gave them the opportunity to ask questions after providing them with concrete details about what it meant to participate in this research. The next day after the meeting, I sent them an email including the points covered during the meeting. I collected the signed forms from them on 9 July 2012. At the beginning of each interview, participants were reminded that their involvement was optional, and that they could withdraw from my study at any point without any negative repercussions. The participants’ verbal permission to digitally record their speech for later transcription was also obtained and recalled at the start of each interview.

According to Roberts and Priest (2010: 116), ‘researchers must undertake to keep all information confidential and secure, and to inform participants where and how it will be stored, who will have access to it and how it will be used’. As a result, participants were explicitly told at each time they were interviewed that their names would be anonymous and that whatever information they provided would not be associated with their names. The data

collected were also stored in a safe and secure place, and were accessed only by the researcher and the other coder after obtaining the participants' permission. Additionally, when asked to write diaries and LLHs, the participants were informed in advance that their writing would be for research and not for assessment purposes. They were also told that there was no 'right' or 'wrong', or 'good' or 'bad' in terms of their learning strategies. It should be noted that respecting confidentiality in the present study was not just applied to the use of the participants' names, but extended to include their own religious and political stances. For example, four participants (Fadi, Jamal, Rama and Zainab) came from three Arab countries (Iraq, Libya and Syria), which were in a state of political turmoil at the time of collecting and analysing data. With this in mind, I was keen not to choose words which reflected my personal stance regarding the political situation in their countries of origin, nor to ask them to express their views about this. Nonetheless, I showed interest in the safety of their families back home.

Following Sonali's (2006: 211) advice, I made sure that there were mutual benefits to those who would participate in my study, by offering extra help to them, such as proofreading their essays. As described in Section 5.4.2.2, the choice of two academics to help me code and translate the interview data was essentially based on the advantage of having a very good relationship with them before carrying out this research. Nonetheless, I did my best on almost every occasion to show my appreciation for their help by, for example, saying 'thank you' often, inviting them sometimes to a coffee, lunch, or dinner and by exchanging ideas on their research topics.

4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented a description of the data collection process for this study, and introduced the selection of participants and the various methods that were adopted. The chapter that follows outlines the analytical process of this research with reference to Braun' and Clarke's (2006, 2013) systematic guidelines to carrying out thematic analysis (TA).

CHAPTER 5 DATA ANALYSIS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to describe the process of analysing the data of this study from a phenomenographic standpoint. Phenomenographic analysis replicates the relationship between ‘the interviewee and the phenomenon as the transcripts reveal it’, taking into account the critical role of the researcher (Walsh, 2000: 20). The following issues will be discussed in this chapter: the weaknesses and solutions in the processes of phenomenographic analysis, a description of thematic analysis (TA) as the method of analysis of my qualitative data and the application of Braun’ and Clarke’s (2006, 2013) systematic guideline to conducting TA in this research.

5.2 Data Analysis in Phenomenographic Research Studies

According to Ashworth and Lucas (1998: 418), working with phenomenographic data is a long and iterative process, because the interview transcripts need to be read many times in order to elucidate both a definite set of different meanings (categories of description) and a logical structure relating to the relationship between different ways of experiencing the phenomenon under study (the outcome space). Marton (1986) echoes this point, suggesting that

the [phenomenographic] process is tedious, time-consuming, labour-intensive, and interactive. It entails the continual sorting of data...definitions for categories are tested against the data, adjusted, retested, and adjusted again (Marton, 1986: 42).

Walsh (2000: 24) in turn describes phenomenographic analysis as ‘a discovery process’ because the categories of description are not created in advance (i.e. prior to data collection or data analysis). When a phenomenographer searches for their participants’ similarities and differences in order to understand the phenomenon of interest, the focus should be directed to the meaning of the utterances, given that different words might be used to refer to the same concept (Åkerlind et al., 2005: 86).

The following subsections examine two major controversial issues related to the qualitative data analysis in general, and to phenomenographic research in particular.

5.2.1 Controversial Issues in the Process of Phenomenographic Analysis

5.2.1.1 Variation in the Amount of Each Transcript Considered

Yates et al. (2012: 103) point out that phenomenographers use different approaches to analyse their phenomenographic data. For instance, there is a debate regarding whether the focus should be on whole transcripts or on parts of transcripts (Booth, 1997: 138). On the one hand, certain researchers (e.g. Svensson and Theman, 1983; Marton, 1986) support the practice of extracting fundamental quotes from the transcripts (i.e. decontextualised from the original context), and then bringing these quotes together for analysis in one ‘pool of meanings’ (Marton, 1986: 42-43). In this sense, the categories of description are constructed from the selected quotes to uncover the subjects’ understandings of a given phenomenon. According to Svensson and Theman (1983: 36), this approach in analysing phenomenographic data can make the data more manageable, because only the segments relevant to the phenomenon under investigation are highlighted. However, Åkerlind (2012: 221) criticises this approach because it is clearly more difficult to consider quotes in context

when they have been taken out of the transcript. This critique is clearly articulated by Bowden (2000), who states that

I prefer to deal with the whole transcript all of the time....I do believe such de-contextualisation makes the task [producing appropriate categories of description] more difficult and is a methodological variant which is at odds with the underlying relational nature of phenomenography (Bowden, 2000: 12).

On the other hand, some phenomenographers adopt whole transcript analysis (e.g. Green, 2005; Koole, 2012; Trigwell, 2000). From this perspective, the whole transcript should be viewed as ‘a set of interrelated meanings, which can best be understood in relation to each other’ (Åkerlind, 2012: 221). Accordingly, categories of description in a whole transcript approach are formed from ‘groupings of transcripts interpreted’ (Cope, 2006: 99). However, this approach has been criticised on the basis that working with whole transcripts might encourage the perspective of experiencing the phenomenon of interest at an individual level, rather than a collective one (i.e. focusing on a single interview of a participant without making a comparison and contrast with the experiences of other participants) (Åkerlind, *ibid*).

Another criticism of this approach is that there might be more than one way of experiencing the phenomenon described by a participant in an interview (Cope, 2006: 99). Furthermore, the researcher’s clarity as regards the fundamental aspects of the meaning of a given phenomenon might be reduced, because some extracts of the transcripts could be more pertinent to the research questions of a study than others (Bowden, 2005: 12).

The present study has embraced Cope’s (2006) suggestion, which was based on combining the two approaches. According to Cope (2006: 100), data analysis involves considering data ‘at the transcript level and quote level both in and out of context’, with the purpose of obtaining different insights into the collected data (*ibid*). In other words, the transcripts were

first read as a whole, and then significant quotes were extracted. This point will be revisited in the forthcoming sections.

5.2.1.2 Variation in Ways of Constructing Structure

Walsh (2000: 23-24) mentions another controversial issue related to ‘the outcome space’ (i.e. the graphical representation of the produced conceptions or themes), in terms of whether it should be seen as the result of the professional judgement of the researcher, or that of the data collected. Bowden (2000: 1) claims that ascribing the emergence of the outcome space in a phenomenographic study solely to the researcher’s decision is a ‘denial of the voice of the individual[s]’. This in turn contradicts the essential epistemological assumption of phenomenography, which highlights the importance of viewing a specific phenomenon from a second-order stance (ibid). Considering the difficulty of a researcher to be completely free of bias (Adawi et al., 2002: 86-87), this research has adopted Åkerlind’s (2012: 123) position, in which the outcome space in phenomenographic studies reflects ‘both the data and researchers’ judgements in interpreting the data’. Therefore, a combined technique of inductive and deductive thematic analysis was advocated in this study, as will be discussed in Section 5.4.2.2.

5.3 Adopting Thematic Analysis (TA) in the Present Study

As already discussed, the outcomes of a phenomenographic analysis and interpretations of the data need to be detailed, and both the similarities and differences in the participants’ themes and conceptions regarding the phenomenon under investigation need to be identified.

As a consequence, thematic analysis (TA) which is a fundamental method for qualitative analysis and suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006; 2013) appeared to be the most feasible way of analysing the interview transcripts of this research to thematise the participants' experienced world. TA is 'a method for identifying and interpreting patterns of meaning (themes) across qualitative data in rich detail' (Clarke and Braun, 2014: 1102). It moves beyond 'counting explicit words or phrases' (Guest et al., 2012: 10) to capturing 'something important about the data in relation to the research questions' (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 82). In this sense, the resultant themes are unknown prior to the analysis.

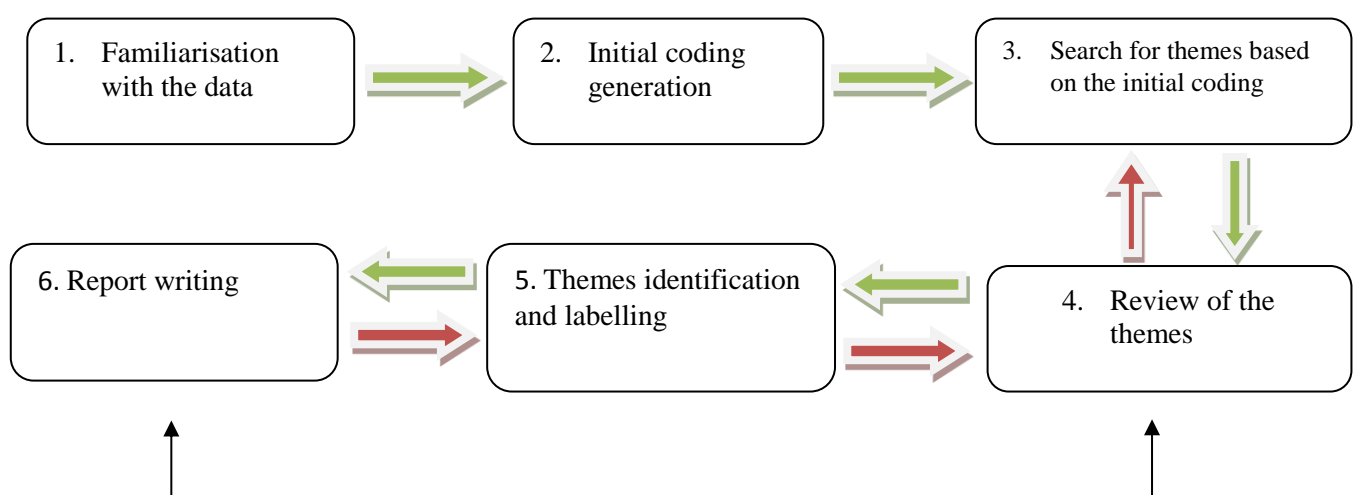
In addressing the advantages of undertaking qualitative TA, Howitt and Cramer (2011: 328) suggest that TA is a relatively quick and easy method to learn and carry out for a novice qualitative researcher. This is because it does not need 'the subtle and sophisticated appreciation of a great deal of the theory underlying the method' (i.e. is not wedded to any preexisting theoretical framework) (ibid). Additionally, TA is appropriate for managing and organising large data sets 'without losing the context', and highlighting any similarities and differences within and across data sets (Wiebe et al., 2010: 926). Therefore, employing a TA as the method of analysis was important for the present study, which was based on the data gathered from one hundred and twenty-two semi-structured interviews to provide a rich and detailed account of the participants' language learning experiences and strategy use before and after their arrival in the UK. Furthermore, Braun and Clarke (2013: 202) argue that TA is flexible in terms of how it is carried out. That is, the identification of themes in TA can be carried out inductively (i.e. data-driven), deductively (i.e. theory-driven) or 'a hybrid of inductive and deductive coding' (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006: 80; Patton, 2002: 452-453). This point will be further explained in Section 5.4.2.2.

5.4 Applying Braun' and Clarke's (2006, 2013) Six Phases of Thematic Analysis in this Study

This section describes the process of data analysis followed in this research, starting with the familiarisation stage, and ending by defining and naming the categories of description or themes, using Braun' and Clarke's (2006, 2013) systematic guidelines to conducting TA.

The whole process of data analysis is not 'linear' but 'recursive' with 'movement back and forth as needed, throughout the phases' (ibid, 2006: 86). In other words, the different phases need to be viewed as being interactive, although each phase itself has its own vital role in constructing the categories and outcome space. Marton (1997: 100) adds that each successive phase has implications not only for the phases that come after it, but also for those that precede it. The entire recursive process of TA is summarised in the following figure, which is instigated by Howitt and Cramer (2011: 336):

Figure 8: Braun and Clarke's model of TA suggested by Howitt and Cramer (2011: 336)



5.4.1 Phase 1: Familiarisation with the Data

This phase was ‘the bedrock’ of the process of data analysis because it helped the researcher become familiar with all aspects of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 87). In order to familiarise myself with the data, the following steps were taken:

5.4.1.1 Transcription of Semi-structured, Audio-recorded Interviews after Verifying their Quality

When interviewing participants in this study, I attempted to absorb as much of what was being said as possible. After each interview with my participants, the quality of the audio recordings was directly checked by listening through them because recordings could give the chance to review data over and over again. Most of the recordings were of good sound quality. However, on a few occasions, the interviewee’s voice was not loud enough. In the next interview with that interviewee, I therefore asked them to mention what they had said in the unclear part of the previous interview after playing the recording of that interview.

All audio-recording interviews of this research were transcribed verbatim by the researcher himself. Each interview was transcribed before the next interview with the same participant, which proved to be an intensive schedule. According to Kvale (1996: 165), transcribing involves a transition from oral to written language and from living and personal conversation to a frozen text, which is ready to be read analytically. Although the task of transcribing phenomenographic interviews is arduous and time-consuming (McLellan et al., 2003: 73), this task enabled me to become somewhat familiar with the interviewees’ different ways of thinking. Additionally, transcribing the interviews would ensure that the data analysis process was carried out ‘with an open mind rather than imposing an existing structure’ (Cope, 2004:

9). However, there was a limitation in capturing the full picture of my participants' conceptions in this stage of transcribing the interviews, because I processed transcriptions slowly and this often entailed just a few words at a time. As mentioned in Chapter 4 (Section 4.5.1), the interviews were conducted in Arabic, the participants' language of choice, except for the Iraqi participant, Zainab, who opted for English (for a sample of interview transcripts, see Appendix 5).

5.4.1.2 Noting Initial Ideas after Reading through Transcripts Several Times

After producing transcripts of each research stage, the researcher checked the texts against the original audio recordings and made the refinements needed. Then, the transcripts were read and reread, as Braun and Clarke (2013: 205) put it, 'actively, analytically, and critically' through considering both the surface and hidden meanings of the participants' words. Meanwhile, some notes on individual transcripts were made, highlighting specific participant statements that referred to their strategic learning efforts in different learning contexts. However, note-making at this stage was 'observational and casual' rather than 'systematic and inclusive', in the sense that the notes that the researcher made worked as 'memory aids' and 'triggers for coding and analysis' (ibid, 2012: 61).

5.4.2 Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes

Coding is 'a process of identifying aspects of the data that relate to your research questions' (Braun and Clarke, 2013: 206). The main purpose of open or initial coding was to 'open

inquiry widely' (Bruce et al., 2012: 364), in that the researcher needed to 'believe everything and believe nothing' (Struss, 1987: 28) while undertaking open coding of this study.

5.4.2.1 Coding at a Semantic, Explicit Level, or at a Latent, Interpretative Level

Braun and Clarke (2006: 84) point out that the first important decision in the coding process is choosing the level at which codes are identified. The data coding can be either at a semantic or explicit level, or at a latent or interpretative level (ibid). The former represents the 'visible or apparent content of something' (Boyatzis 1998: 16). That is, the researcher does not search for anything beyond what their participants have said or written. In order to explore the influence of material resources on the participants' strategy use in this research, for example, the number of mentions of specific words such as 'textbook', 'technologies', and 'dictionary' needed to be counted.

In contrast, the latent or interpretative level examines the 'underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations -and ideologies-that are theorized as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data' (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 83-84). In this respect, the researcher attempted to explore the reasons for mentioning the words related to the material resources such as 'handouts', 'dictionary' or 'computers' in a specific situated context. A dictionary might be used to improve a particular participant's vocabulary repertoire, or to help them complete a learning task. Although some researchers (Braun and Clarke 2006; Frith and Gleeson, 2004) support the assumption that the coding process should focus exclusively on one level i.e. either the explicit or latent level, Boyatzis (1998: 16) underlines the possibility of undertaking the two levels simultaneously. This research has adopted the latter approach.

5.4.2.2 Trying out Different Approaches and Techniques while Coding Data

Another important decision in the coding process is deciding whether to code inductively (data-driven) or deductively (theory-driven) (Braun and Clarke, 2013: 205). According to Patton (2002: 452), an inductive approach to data coding and analysis involves ‘*discovering* patterns, themes and categories in one’s data’ (author’s emphasis). In other words, the codes and themes in an inductive analysis are obtained from the content of the data themselves, rather than from ‘a pre-existing coding frame, or the researcher’s analytic pre-conceptions’ (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 83). In contrast, the codes and themes in a deductive approach basically derive from ‘concepts and ideas the researcher brings to the data—here, what is mapped by the researcher during analysis does not necessarily closely link to the semantic data content’ (ibid, 2012: 58). Therefore, in a deductive analysis, the researcher seeks to analyse a specific area of the data pertaining to a particular research question.

As described in Section 3.3.3.3 of Chapter 3, this illustrative phenomenographic case study has adopted the process of ‘selective bracketing’ by looking for ways to ‘avoid steering data and analysis on preconceived paths’ (Adawi et al., 2002: 86-87). To achieve this, I began by practising different analytical techniques to find out various ways of viewing the data. I first tried out an inductive approach to data coding and analysis, relying on Van Manen’s (1997: 87-98) two different techniques in data coding: the detailed reading technique and the holistic reading one. In the detailed reading technique, Van Manen (1997: 93) suggests that the researcher needs to scrutinise each sentence or a group of sentences by asking questions such as, ‘How does this participant make sense of their experiences of a specific phenomenon?’ Conversely, the holistic reading technique refers to looking at the whole transcript as a set of interrelated meanings with a view to capturing the relationships between them (ibid: 1996).

I began open coding with Nasser's data because I had often conducted interviews with him before other participants, due to his availability. I read and reread the transcripts of Nasser's interviews by focusing on repeated words and key concepts that seemed pertinent to his strategy use. I came up with the following list of codes in relation to his interview transcripts in the first two research stages:

Table 12: The initial coding of Nasser's interview transcripts in the first two research stages

The first research stage (past language experiences and his strategy use in homeland)	Arabic	English
	بدايه تعلم اللغة الانكليزيه	Beginning of learning English
	التكرار	Repetition
	التعلم من اجل الامتحان	Exam-oriented learning
	حفظ المفردات	memorise vocabulary
	مدرسه الحكوميه	State school
	اساتذه اللغة الانكليزيه	English teachers
	امتحان الكفاءه اللغويه	IELTS
	مراجع لتعلم اللغة الانكليزية	English teaching learning materials
	استخدام القاموس الورقي (عربي-انكليزي)	The use of paper dictionary (English-Arabic)
	الشركه الحكوميه للهندسه الصناعيه	The state company for industrial engineering
	جامعه حكوميه	Public University
	مدرس انكليزي خصوصي	Private English tutor
	اهداف التعلم	Learning objectives
	الافلام الانكليزيه	English films
	مهاره الكتابه	English writing

	مهاره القواعد	English grammar
	مهاره الاستماع	English listening
	التفاعل بين المدرس والطالب	Teacher-Student Interaction
	ممارسه اللغة الانكليزيه	Practice English
	دعم العائلة	Family support
	استخدام غوغل للترجمة	Google translate
	التحضير للسفر خارج البلاد	Preparation for travel abroad
	الصعوبات	Difficulties
	الاغاني الانكليزية	English songs
The second research stage (pre-sessional English course)	الدوره التحضيريه	Pre-sessional course
	اساتذه ناطقين اللغة الانكليزيه	Native English teachers
	تقديم درس	Doing a presentation
	تسهيلات المكتبة	Library facilities
	مهاره التكلم	Speaking skills
	مهاره الكتابه	Writing skill
	مهاره القراءه	Reading skill
	استخدام المراجع	Referencing
	الاستنتاج	Inferencing
	التلخيص	Summarising
	الصعوبات الغير لغويه	Non-linguistic difficulties
	السكن الجامعي	Living in campus
	مفهوم الذات	Self-concept
	الشبكات الاجتماعيه	Social networks
	استخدام المواد الخارجيه كالورق المتعلقه	External materials such as handouts

	بالدرس	
	المعتقدات الدينية	Religious beliefs
	كتابة مشروع صغير	writing a micro project
	التقييم النهائي	Final assessment
	استخدام القاموس الورقي او كسفورد (انكليزي-انكليزي)	The use of Oxford paper dictionary (English-English)
	البيئة الصفية	Classroom environment

In order to establish the reliability of the resultant codes before identifying the final emergent themes, I relied firstly on the ‘coder reliability check’ by sending these codes, along with different participants’ transcripts, to another coder after obtaining my participants’ permission. The other coder was a PhD degree holder in English Language Teaching from Warwick University, UK. The selection of this coder was based on the grounds that he was familiar with Arabic, the language of transcription and coding, in addition to having a very good relationship with the researcher. The other coder and I met four times to discuss and compare our coding process.

Given that the percentage agreement between the coders before and after consultation should be above 75% to be considered reasonable (Van Rossum and Hamer, 2010: 49), we, the coders, failed to reach similar results, since each one had his own list of codes. Accordingly, the list became longer, and I became confused. In addition, the formed lists of LLSs did not reflect the dynamic nature of LLSs, since they were produced ‘out of context’, and this contradicts the main objective of this research. For this reason, I came to the conclusion that using merely the inductive approach to data coding and analysis did not fit this research. Likewise, it seemed inappropriate to adopt only deductive thematic analysis in this study, given that it embraced phenomenography; thus, the categories of description should not have

been established or discovered before the coding began. Based on this, a combined technique of inductive and deductive thematic analysis was utilised in this research, in the expectation that the drawbacks of one would be enhanced by the strengths of the other. With this in mind, the themes or categories of description in this study were developed as a result of the dialectical relationship between theoretical perspective and data analysis through a long and iterative process of working with and from the data, and wide reading (Sinkovics and Alfoldi, 2012: 109).

The data were coded manually with reference to the research questions of this study, which espoused a sociocultural perspective, focusing on the statements that captured the influences of different contextual realities (e.g., family members and teachers in addition to learning discourses) on the participants' language learning efforts and their strategy use and development in and out of the formal settings. Therefore, another list of codes was produced. The following is a sample of some of the resultant codes gained from Nasser's interview transcripts in relation to the second research question:

Table 13 A sample of the initial analysis of Nasser's data with reference to the research questions

<i>RQ2</i> What influences the participants' particular patterns of LLSs in their homelands?		
The situation	What did Nasser gain from this situated language learning experience?	Note
When I was in school, I used to copy the teacher's blackboard writing in my notebook. There were no cassettes or CD video...my homework sometimes was just writing things down multiple times.	Dissatisfied and saw learning English as a daunting task because of the overdependence on repetition and memorisation.	The influence of mediating agents i.e. teachers

When I was 12 years old, I went with my cousin to an Italian restaurant. He used English in ordering his meal. He was the same age as me. But he was studying in a private school. I felt annoyed since he refused to tell me what he ordered.	He did not receive enough support from his family because he was not sent to an outstanding private school.	The influence of family background
I followed my friend's advice and enrolled in private supplementary tutoring after attending the university where English was the medium of instruction of some subjects.	Nasser was instrumentally motivated, seeing English as a tool that was necessary for study.	The impact of 'shadow education' (i.e. privatisation in the education sector) on his strategy use
When I worked in a company after graduation, I found difficulty in writing reports in English about the offers presented by other companies. This was because the exam questions at university were automated... At school, I used to memorise the paragraph writing exercises by heart.	Nasser recognised the importance of developing his English academic writing for his future job.	The changes in his beliefs about English

In effect, using 'a hybrid of inductive and deductive coding' helped me and the other coder get a better understanding of the participants' strategic learning efforts at 'an individual level'. However, the process of analysis in a phenomenographic study should focus on key aspects of the collective experience, because each individual holds a partial awareness about a particular phenomenon (for more details, see Section 3.3.2.1 of Chapter 3). As Åkerlind (2012: 117) argues, '[E]very transcript, or expression of meanings, is interpreted within the

context of the group of transcripts or meanings as a whole, in terms of similarities to and differences from other transcripts or meanings'. In this respect, Nasser's interview transcript could not be understood separately from other participants in this research study.

With this in mind, and after having a discussion with my supervisor and some colleagues, I decided to use the qualitative data processing software programme NVivo10 in order to help me analyse my data and put the strategies reported 'in context'. Therefore, I started familiarising myself with NVivo10. Moreover, before commencing the coding using this qualitative data software, I consulted a Taiwanese PhD student at Warwick University because she was familiar with the NVivo software, with qualitative data analysis and with thematic analysis too. When I started the initial coding process across eight cases on NVivo10, I coded in Arabic and then translated the codes after I had completed each coding process.

It should be borne in mind that although the NVivo 10 software enhanced TA by 'organising the data and allowing the codes to be sorted, classified and grouped' (Eyles and Williams, 2008: 76), it was only an aid to the organisation of the material rather than in itself an interpretative device. However, the task of creating codes was not easy, because I found sometimes that the same statement could be interpreted differently, and could include different people, times and places as well. In effect, they could be coded differently or assigned to more than one code. Gradually, a tentative coding scheme emerged in the continual interaction between the data and me, the coder.

5.4.3 Phase 3: Searching for Themes Based on the Initial Coding

This phase involved the collation of codes that shared some unifying feature to generate themes and sub-themes (Braun and Clarke, 2013: 224). A theme 'captures something

important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of *patterned* response or meaning within the data set' (ibid, 2006: 82, authors' emphasis). In other words, the researcher at this stage essentially focused on the relationships between the codes to identify the data associated with each theme.

Four higher codes: homeland, the moment of arrival in the UK, the developmental stage and the exit stage were identified. The codes that focused on the participants' strategic language learning efforts prior to their arrival in the UK were grouped according to 'homeland', their LLS use and their motivations and belief about English during their attendance on the pre-session course at a UK University in 'the moment of arrival in the UK', the shifts in their LLS use during their attendance on the first and second semesters of their MA course at University in 'the developmental stage', and their strategy use and identity development in the last term of their MA programmes and beyond in 'the exit stage'. Notably, the researcher cross-examined interview accounts at this stage with learner diaries, email exchanges and participants' short accounts of language learning.

5.4.4 Phase 4: Review of the Themes

This phase, as suggested by both Braun and Clarke (2013: 234), involves 'a recursive process' in which the tentative themes formed in the previous phase should be tested against the coded data and the entire data set. Howitt and Cramer (2011: 340) refer to two main possibilities that a researcher can use to testify the quality of the developing themes:

- If one or more of the tentative themes have insufficient extracts of data to support the identified theme, the researcher should either modify or disregard that theme in this respect.

- If the collated extracts of data associated with the tentative theme entail an indication to a new theme, the developing theme should be split up into another theme in this case.

Accordingly, the researcher checked the applicability of his themes to both collected extracts and the entire dataset. In order to verify the tentative list of themes produced in the previous phase, the researcher sent only his initial coding to the other coder in order to ascertain that the latter would not be influenced by the tentative themes. Following this, I compared my results with his, and we discussed the collated extracts of data associated with each theme about which we disagreed. We either reached agreement or were in a position to reconsider our own list of themes.

5.4.5 Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes

Braun and Clarke (2013: 249) state that a researcher should be capable at the end of this phase of portraying aptly what distinguishes each theme, and that this can be done through summarising the core of each theme and its sub-themes in a couple of sentences. During this phase, and after coming to an agreement with the other coder about the central themes of each stage of this study, we identified sub-themes within each theme in order to maintain the complexity and diversity of the participants' awareness and dynamic use of LLSs across time and space. The sub-themes essentially showed the influence of both material and social resources on the participants' LLS use, in addition to their changing motivations and beliefs about English language. For example, the theme 'the influence of social resources on the participants' strategic language learning efforts' was shared in the four research stages. The sub-themes of this theme were labelled in terms of the relationships of human agents to the participants; this in turn led to the identification of different kinds of fundamental agents ranked in each research stage in relation to their importance to the participants. For example,

immediate family members and English teachers were the most influential actors in the first research stage, English tutors and co-nationals (i.e. friends from the Middle East) were in the second stage, peers in the third stage and dissertation supervisors in the exit stage.

Given that naming both themes and their sub-themes accurately ‘cannot take place in a vacuum’ but should be achieved in relation to the data (Howitt and Cramer, 2011: 340), I, with the assistance of the other coder, re-read the transcripts with special focus on the coded extracts, to assure that the produced themes and sub-themes actually accounted for the data and depicted the ongoing complex use of LLSs by the participants of this study. Consequently, the final thematic maps of each research stage at the end of this phase were produced. The maps will be presented at the beginning of reporting findings of each stage (i.e. in Chapters 6 and 7).

5.4.6 Phase 6 Report Writing

This phase involved the production of the research report. Once all the themes had been obtained, the researcher provided extracts for each theme to show the participants’ account. The themes and extracts of each stage of my data analysis will be explained in Chapters 6 and 7.

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the steps that are usually utilised while analysing the data of a phenomenographic study, before moving on to describe the analytical process of this particular research study with reference to Braun’ and Clarke’s (2006, 2013) systematic

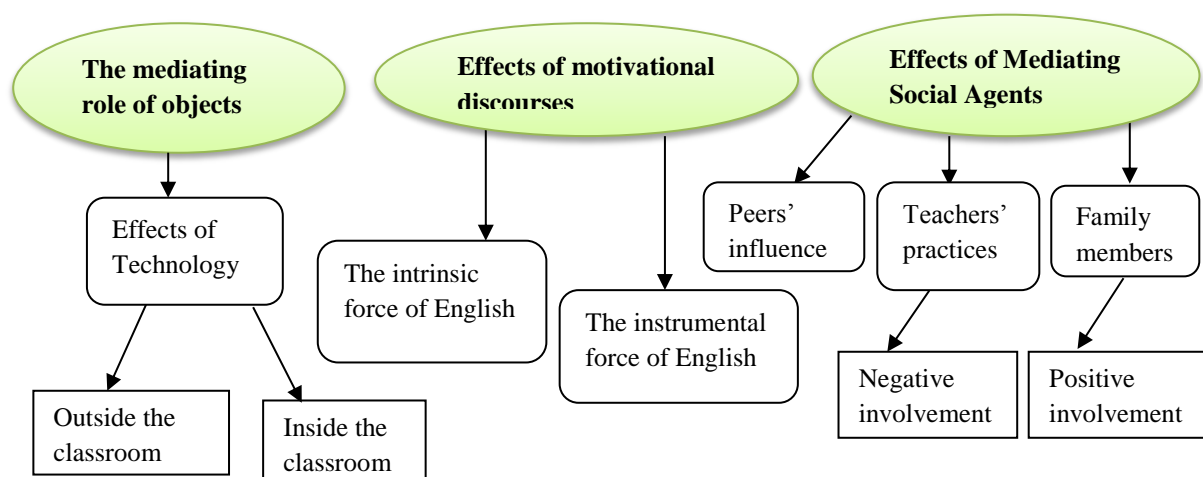
guidelines to carrying out thematic analysis (TA). In chapters 6 and 7, the participants' biographical vignettes will be explained in addition to the findings of the data analysis of this study, through outlining the thematic map of each of the four stages and the coded extracts at hand. Instead of making a list of strategies, the findings of this research will be presented based on the research questions through thick descriptions. In doing this, the ongoing, complex interactions between the participants' exercise of their agency and the contextual conditions may be captured.

CHAPTER 6 THE PARTICIPANTS' LANGUAGE STRATEGY USE IN THEIR ARAB HOMELANDS

6.1 Introduction

Guided by Braun' and Clarke's (2006; 2013) systematic guideline to conducting thematic analysis (TA) in this longitudinal qualitative research, the current chapter reports on the findings from the first research stage. This stage was concerned with the participants' past language learning experiences in their Arab homelands, with special focus on their strategy use and learning motivations. It served as a baseline for the inquiry in its succeeding stages. This chapter will begin with a synopsis of each participant's biography. Following this biographical account, the core themes and sub-themes that influenced the participants' strategic learning efforts in their homelands will be explained in 'a concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive, and interesting' way (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 23). In this stage, the thematic map and the coded extracts of each research stage became ready. The following is the thematic map of the first research stage:

Figure 9: Thematic map of the First Research Stage



Before presenting the findings, some points related to the keys to interview data references need to be clarified:

1) Each of the eight participants was given a symbol according to the first letter of their names: F→Fadi, K→ Khaled, J→Jamal, N→Nasser, M→Mouza, R→Rama, Y→Yazn and Z→Zainab.

2) As already mentioned, each participant was interviewed thirteen to fifteen times (for more details about the interview schedules, see Table 8 in Chapter 4). The participant's symbol and his/her interview number were mentioned after each interview extract. For example, 'Transcript No. F2, 22-29' indicates that the quote was an extract from Fadi's second interview from lines 22 to 29.

6.2 Biographical Vignettes of the Participants in this Research

This section presents a short biographical vignette of each participant, constructed from their short written accounts of their past English learning experiences and their first interview data.

➤ Zainab

Zainab was born in 1989 into a highly educated professional family in Baghdad, the capital of Iraq. Her late father was an architect, and her mother a pharmacist. She grew up with an older and a younger brother. Although English language began to be taught as a compulsory subject in Iraqi public schools from the intermediate level in her schooldays, Zainab's English language learning started in grade 2 in a primary private school when she was 7 years old. She was relatively successful in English from the beginning, a success which she attributed primarily to the influence of her eldest brother, a holder of a Diploma in English

literature, and in addition to the education system of the private school at which she studied. At this school, English was the medium of instruction of many taught subjects, and students had to communicate in English with each other. Her parents also sent her to a private University, where most subjects were taught in English by some native speakers of English. After earning a bachelor's degree in Business and Management, she gained a governmental sponsorship to complete her postgraduate studies in the UK.

➤ **Fadi**

Fadi was born in 1988 into a highly educated and well-established family in Damascus, the capital of Syria. His father was a surgeon in a government hospital and his mother an ophthalmologist. He grew up with his younger sister. Fadi started learning English formally in an English-Arabic private kindergarten when he was 5 years old. His parents sent him to outstanding private educational establishments throughout his education. The medium of instruction for many subjects at his school was English, and he was taught by a number of native speakers of English. Fadi mentioned that he had experienced the value of use of the English language at an early age because some of his colleagues at school were non-native speakers of Arabic. Additionally, he was inspired by British culture brought back by his uncle's family, who were living in the UK. After graduation from dentistry, his parents encouraged Fadi to complete his higher studies in the UK, principally because of the political turmoil in Syria.

➤ **Yazn**

Yazn was born in 1990 into a well-educated, middle-class family in Amman, the capital of Jordan. He was the second child in his family, and grew up with an older brother and two younger sisters. His father worked in one of the world's largest commodities trading

companies, whereas his mother was a maths teacher. Yazn started learning English formally in a private kindergarten when he was 5 years old. His parents sent him to private schools in order to get a better education. However, the focus of Yazn's schools was more on scientific subjects than on English. Yazn recalled that he realised the importance of English in his life at university level because the medium of instruction of some subjects was English. After graduation from university, Yazn's father decided to send Yazn to the UK to gain an MA in his field of Industrial Engineering.

➤ **Nasser**

Nasser was born in 1989 to a middle class family in Jeddah, in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). Nasser was the youngest son in his family, and had two sisters and three brothers. Nasser's father worked as a government clerk, and his mother was a housewife. His parents were not highly educated, and accordingly they were not closely involved in his educational progress and language learning. Nasser's English language learning started in Saudi public schools from the intermediate level when he was 12 years old. Nasser became aware of the salience of English language in his life when commencing his undergraduate degree in Industrial Engineering, where the medium of instruction of many subjects was English. After earning a Bachelor's degree in Industrial Engineering, Nasser was employed immediately in one of the leading Saudi government companies in the industry. After four months of work, Nasser was offered a Master's scholarship to the UK by that company. Consequently, the value of English language in Nasser's life experience was maximised because he needed to obtain a score of Band 6 in the IELTS exam. He achieved the required score with the help of an Australian tutor.

➤ **Khaled**

Khaled was born in 1990 to a middle class family in Mecca, KSA. Khaled grew up with three older sisters and one younger brother. His father was a maths teacher, whereas his mother was a housewife. Khaled recalled that his eldest sister, an English teacher, forced him to memorise as many English words as possible when he was a young child. He expressed his satisfaction with the English instruction he received during various stages of his academic study in public Saudi educational settings, especially at university level. He was more interested in science subjects at school than English. He gained a Master's scholarship to the UK from the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education. Khaled attended private IELTS tuition given by a British teacher for two months to attain the required score in the IELTS exam.

➤ **Rama**

Rama was born in 1989 into a large family in the countryside near Damascus, Syria's capital. Rama's parents were farmers and only educated up to a primary school level. As a result, they were not directly engaged in her educational progress and language learning. She was the fifth child, and grew up with four older brothers and two younger sisters. Rama's English language learning began at grade five of a primary public school when she was 10 years old. She was the only child in her family that attended university. Rama became aware of the importance of English in her life after earning a Bachelor's degree in Agricultural Engineering and being assigned as a teaching assistant at Damascus University to be sent afterwards to the UK to complete her postgraduate studies. She thus needed to demonstrate adequate English proficiency by obtaining a high score in either the IELTS or TOEFL exam. Rama took the TOEFL exams three times to achieve the required score.

➤ **Mouza**

Mouza was born in 1987 into a middle class family in Ajman, United Arab Emirates (UAE). She was the third child in her family, and grew up with two older brothers and one younger sister. Mouza was married with one son. Her father was a retired policeman, and her mother a housewife. She formally started her English language learning in grade 4 in a primary public school when she was 9 years old. Mouza became attentive to the significance of English in her life after commencing her undergraduate studies in gynaecology, where the medium of instruction for some core subjects was English. After graduation, Mouza worked in one of the Emirati governmental hospitals for six months, before gaining a Master's scholarship in Gynaecology to the UK from the Emirati Ministry of Higher Education.

➤ **Jamal**

Jamal was born in 1985 to an upper-middle class family in Tripoli, the capital of Libya. He was the second child and grew up with one older brother and three younger sisters. He is married with two children. His father was a judge in the Libyan Supreme Court, whereas his mother was a housewife. He learnt English formally when he was 17 years old because English language was taught as a compulsory subject in Libyan public schools from the third year of secondary school in his school days. He was encouraged by his father to enrol in the Department of English. Because of political turbulence in Libya, Jamal decided to make use of the privilege of receiving a scholarship from the Libyan government to pursue his postgraduate studies in the UK.

6.3 Counting Strategies in the Interview Data

The aim of counting the participants' strategy use was to present a global portrait of what might have been deployed by the participants to develop their English in their homelands. As explained in Section 3.3.2.1 of Chapter 2, this research adopted Griffiths' and Oxford's (2014: 2) approach to strategy classification, by reporting the patterns of strategy use displayed in the data according to the participants' experiential accounts and their language learning goals rather than any pre-existing classification system. Two key points were taken into consideration while counting the participants' strategy use in the interview data (see Table 14). The first was that when a particular participant made several references to the same strategy in their experiential accounts, only one count was taken for each learning stage. The second indicated that as LLSs are goal-oriented (Dörnyei, 2005: 146), the language learning experiences of most participants before coming to the UK appeared to be divided into two phases: the first covering the school level of their education, and the second starting after going to university and during their preparation for IELTS/TOEFL.

Table 14 Strategies used by the participants in their homelands *Phase1: the school level of the participants' education; Phase2: During and after the participants' attendance at the university

Strategy classification according to the findings of this study	Strategy items	participants	
		<i>Phase 1</i>	<i>Phase 2</i>
	Work on simulation exam papers/exercise books	All participants	
	Ask teachers for an L1 translation	All participants excluding Fadi, Yazn and Zainab	

Compulsory strategies (exam-taking necessities with direct involvement/coercion from social agents)	Memorise by heart the short essays assigned by teachers	All participants	Jamal and Rama
	Memorise texts and vocabulary by heart	All participants excluding Zainab	
	Repeat words/sentences aloud (chorally or individually)	All participants	
	writing words/ sentences many times to remember it	All participants	
	Follow teachers' teaching by classifying new words into groups based on their type and topic using different colours	Fadi and Zainab	
	Work on simulation exam papers/ exercise books	All participants	
	Listen to cassettes	Fadi, Mouza, Yazn and Zainab	
	Assign specific time daily to practise English with some family members (as ordered by teachers)	Zainab	
	Use almost only English inside the classroom to avoid punishment	Fadi, Yazn and Zainab	
	Cooperate with classmates to complete specific tasks	Fadi, Yazn and Zainab	Fadi, Mouza, Yazn and Zainab
	Focus on specific elements while reading stories assigned by teachers	Zainab	
	Watch short videos to	Fadi	

	complete reading comprehension questions		
Voluntary strategies (little external coercion but more external encouragement)	Participate in English-related competitions and clubs	Zainab and Fadi	Fadi, Yazn and Zainab
	Memorise English words/texts/lyrics	All participants	
	Reading poetry	Zainab	
	Reading English magazines		Fadi, Mouza and Yazn
	Murmur to one's self	All participants	
	Open up a conference room at yahoo messenger to do homework with some colleagues at university		Zainab
	Watch some YouTube guitar video lessons in English		Yazn
	Listen to English songs to relax or to learn new phrases/words	Khaled	Jamal, Khaled and Zainab
	Attempt to use the new vocabulary in daily life	Fadi, Yazn and Zainab	
	Play English PC game	Fadi, Yazn and Zainab	
	Seek opportunities to practise English outside the classroom	Fadi and Zainab	All participants
	Installing electronic dictionaries on mobile phones		Mouza and Zainab
	Read extracurricular materials		Fadi, Yazn and Zainab

As shown in the above table, the participants' strategy use in their homelands was classified into two main categories: 'compulsory strategies' and 'voluntary strategies'. According to the findings of this research, 'compulsory strategies' represented the strategies deployed by the participants in response to the direct involvement or coercion imposed upon them by some influential agents, principally teachers and parents (Gao, 2010a). These strategies were basically associated with the goal of grade-getting. Conversely, 'voluntary strategies' signified the strategies used by the participants as a result of their own language learning beliefs and personal ambitions as regards mastering English, together with receiving external encouragement (Huang and Andrews, 2010). The following two extracts taken from Zainab's interview transcripts exemplify the distinction between compulsory and voluntary strategies:

We had to read 15 short stories in English each year because they were formally assessed. The teacher would have counted the number of the pages that I read. She told us to focus on specific details such as the main characters, setting and plot of each story (Transcript No. Z2, 143-146).

During the summer period, I used to read English poetry. I found some Shakespeare's works in my brother's personal library. Poetry not only helped me to learn new words but also to know more about English culture (Transcript No. Z4, 18-20).

In the first extract, Zainab appeared to feel obliged to pay greater selective attention to certain details of the stories she read for a compulsory English test at school. However, the second extract shows that Zainab exercised a higher degree of choice in relation to the use of LLSs while reading some poems in summer; namely, learning new words in context and developing understanding of the cultures of English-speaking societies. However, it sometimes seems difficult to detach the participants' use of 'voluntary' strategies from success in learning English in academic settings. For example, almost all participants started watching English programmes after going to university to improve their English and to help them better understand the academic lectures delivered by some of their tutors at university.

As can be seen from Table 14, they largely followed teachers' course teaching, read to comprehend textbook texts, and recited texts from textbooks, both in and outside educational establishments. Outside formal settings, they took extra English tuition, read extracurricular materials, memorised words and entire English essays, read poetry and occasionally watched English programmes in their spare time. Moreover, all the participants worked on simulation exam exercises in the Arab World prior to their coming to the UK.

Table 14 also shows that the five participants who were educated in public formal settings employed fewer 'voluntary' strategies than those educated in private institutions (i.e. Fadi, Yazn and Zainab), principally at the school level of their education. Related to this, there was an avoidance as regards the use of social strategies by these five participants before entering university, mostly, because of the dominant use of Arabic inside the classroom and the insufficient support received from their family members at that stage. This point will be further explained in the forthcoming section.

6.4 Interpreting the Participants' Strategy Use in their Homelands

While the previous section has provided a general picture of the participants' pattern of strategy use in their respective homelands, this section aims to give more in-depth information about the factors that led the participants to choose and use the strategies listed in Table 14.

6.4.1 Effects of Mediating Social Agents

6.4.1.1 Overview

Based on the sociocultural theoretical underpinnings discussed in Chapter 2, language learning is ‘a socially mediated process’ (Modarresi and Jalilzadeh, 2011: 147), in the sense that language learners act on the world with the help of a host of social agents (e.g. family members and teachers) across different social spaces to mediate their language learning beliefs, motivations and strategy use (Kehrwald, 2013: 92). With this in mind and based on the codes derived from the analysis of the interview transcripts in this research stage, three kinds of fundamental social affordances emerged, namely, family members, teachers, and peers. The findings at this stage of the research suggest that the behaviour of these social affordances played a pivotal role in either reinforcing or hindering the participants’ strategy use in addition to other relevant aspects of language learning. These findings will be presented in detail in the forthcoming sections.

6.4.1.2 Influences of Family Members

In the present study, the concept of family stands for both the participants’ immediate family members such as parents, spouses, sisters or brothers and their extended family members including aunts, uncles and grandparents (Gao, 2006b: 2). The findings of the current research up to this point reveal that the family, chiefly the participants’ parents, played different positive roles to promote and shape the participants’ LLS use, but also that some parents and other family members actually hindered the language learning of the participants. They did so through a range of discouraging behaviours such as favouring scientific subjects over English or openly belittling the value of English learning.

➤ *Positive Involvement of the Participants' Family Members*

The data suggest that some of the participants' family members internalised their language learning and the use of particular LLSs by orchestrating appropriate language learning environments, such as by purchasing English learning materials, choosing the right school or creating learning opportunities for practising English (Besser and Chik, 2014; Gao, 2012). For example, the parents of Fadi and Zainab, the Syrian and Iraqi participants, attempted to instil positive attitudes and offer motivation for learning English in them from the beginning through sending them intentionally to a private international school at which English was emphasised throughout their school education. The following interview extracts exemplify this point:

When one was sent to a remarkable international school and some of one's teachers were English native speakers, the English level of that person would be definitely developed. This picture described my situation perfectly...the tuition fees of this school were extremely high. So, my parents gave me a spark to learn English (Transcript No. F1, 34-44).

My school was the first private school in Iraq that taught most its classes in English. At that time, my mother insisted that English was not very important but that none could predict what would happen after several years. She was right especially after the fall of the regime of Saddam Hussein (Transcript No. Z2, 55-60).

In this regard, the parents of Fadi and Zainab seemed to buy into 'the idea of the earlier the better', principally when it pertains to their children's English language learning (Tseng, 2008: 83). Although Yazn attended a private school during a specific stage of his education, his school focused on scientific subjects more than on English:

....these schools provided a good quality of education for scientific subjects and were quite fair for English. It's still better than the public one (Transcript No. Y1, 71-73).

In this sense, this form of parental involvement in language learners' development entails choosing the kind and quality of the formal educational setting to offer access to more language input and exposure (Bray et al, 2013; Chan and Bray, 2014).

The parents of five participants (Khaled, Jamal, Mouza, Nasser and Yazn) financed private English tuition classes for their children at a late stage of their children's education, principally after attending university through the medium of English of many subjects and specifically during preparation for IELTS exam. For example, Mouza, the Emirati participant, mentioned that her father allowed her to arrange one-to-one tutorials at home to help her prepare for the IELTS exam. With the same objective, Mouza's father also paid for her two-month subscription to online IELTS preparation on the British Council Website:

Although my parents weren't highly educated, I received from them unlimited financial support...my father gave me the money needed to hire a private Australian tutor to train me on IELTS test. I also subscribed in some websites to try out online some ELTS sample tests (Transcript No. M2, 133-146).

With regard to another participant, Khaled, his father invited one of his friends who was an MA graduate in ELT to assist Khaled in improving his English skills before going on to one of the Saudi Universities:

...a friend of my father, he was proficient in English because he was studying in the UK. He taught me for one month general English...he advised me to watch English channels to improve my listening skill before joining the university (Transcript No. K1, 77-84).

Yazn declared that his parents enabled him to take some general English courses before commencing his undergraduate degree. When asked about the usefulness of the private tutoring that he underwent, Yazn said:

...the secondary school holiday was long. So, my parents advised me to enrol in an English private tutoring course to improve my English before going on to the university. I registered in one of the courses run by the British Council centre. I had a score that put me in the intermediate level in English. In that course, I learnt how to discuss a specific point within a group and to explain how I completed a specific task in front of the class...I also learnt new vocabulary (Transcript No. Y2, 41-64).

The picture that emerges from the above extracts portrays the practice adopted by many participants' parents of giving their children the privilege of attending private supplementary English tutoring, given that many participants came from socio-economically advantaged families. Notably, the parents of Fadi and Yazn were 'the chief decision-makers' behind completing their postgraduate studies abroad. In particular, these parents were responsible for covering the educational and living expenses of their sons.

Apart from Rama, the other participants claimed that their parents or one of their immediate family members purchased some of the English resources (e.g. electronic dictionaries, English movies/novels and videogames) that the former ordered or that these were introduced by the family members themselves to enhance the participants' interest and confidence in learning English. Concerning Jamal's case, for instance, his father was almost the only individual who played a positive role in Jamal's enthusiasm for language learning while he was in Libya, specifically during his undergraduate studies at the Department of English. To support this argument, Jamal reported that his father used not only to share with him some of his own language learning resources, but also to motivate him to become one of the top students at university:

As my father had been living in the UK, he brought with him some English learning materials such as dictionaries and cassettes. He gave me The Oxford Picture

Dictionary and some grammar books because of the lack of English resources in Libya during the period of Al-Gaddafi's rule. Once he visited the UK alone to see some friends. He brought some English materials back for me...he kept reminding me of the potential for excelling at university... my eldest sister also knew some English but I didn't like her way of teaching (Transcript No. J2, 102-131).

In Fadi's case, he recalled that his parents used to reward him whenever he excelled at the primary and intermediate levels of his education, by bringing some animated DVD movies in English into the house:

I was addicted to English language movies and my father knew that. Therefore, his gifts to my sister and me whenever we passed the exam at school were choosing ten animated movies. Most of these movies were in English (Transcript No. F2, 66-68).

This extract portrays the active role that Fadi's parents played in cultivating their son's positive attitude towards learning English. In a similar case, Yazn indicated that his father used to buy computer games and Disney movies for him whenever he excelled in his own study:

...my mother used to help me in writing my English homework. But, my father had the incentive role in my English learning. For example, whenever I got high marks in examinations at school, he rewarded me with one of video games that I liked. They were mostly in English (Transcript No. Y1, 14-19).

The above extract echoes the harmonious interplay between the direct and indirect involvement of Yazn's parents in his English language learning and development.

One participant, Fadi, acknowledged that he was inspired by the Western culture brought back by his uncle's family, who had lived in the UK for twelve years. When asked about the reasons behind his admiration for the Western culture, especially the British, Fadi explained that

My uncle's children increased my love for English. They lived in the UK for many years. I needed to be good at English to communicate with them. They told me a lot about the lifestyle of the British...I hung a large map of Britain on the wall of my room to get to know more about its geography (Transcript No. F2, 81-89).

In this sense, some of Fadi's extended family members played a pivotal role in deepening his interest in learning English. They were also one of the main causes that encouraged him and his parents to choose the UK to complete his postgraduate studies. Surprisingly, perhaps, although Jamal had the privilege of holding a B.A. in English literature, he claimed that he was not influenced by the British culture before coming to the UK, due to the impacts of political and societal factors in Libya. In addressing this point, Jamal stated that

Teaching of English during the late 1980s was banned in Libyan schools due to political tensions between Libya and the West. This had a negative effect on my generation's outlook towards English...I started learning English formally at 17 years I still remembered that the Libyans used to consider the person who talked English as non-patriotic...this view continued until the beginning of the 2000s (Transcript No. J1, 119-141).

➤ *Negative or lack of Involvement from the Participants' Family Members*

It also emerges from the data analysis that some family members seemed in contrast to deter or delay the participants' use of some language learning materials. Nasser's parents, for example, did not allow him to watch movies in English or any other foreign languages because they considered that such movies could contain scenes unsuitable for children. However, Nasser reported that he started watching English movies, especially the American ones, when he attended university. This strategy, as he argued, was fundamental in helping

him gain the required score in IELTS. The following conversation between Nasser and myself echoed this point:

Nasser: ...I discovered the importance of watching movies to improve my English at university and during the preparation for IELTS...it helped me improve my listening skill and learn a great deal of new vocabulary.

Interviewer: Did you use to watch movies before going to university?

Nasser: unfortunately I didn't... I remembered when my father scolded me when he saw me viewing an English movie in one of international TV channels...I was 11 years old. This was because some English movies included scenes of women in revealing clothes (Transcript No. N2, 53-68).

Note that the hindering effect of Nasser's parents on his language access to one of the central language resources appeared to be based on particular cultural and religious grounds that many Arab families hold.

Unlike the other participants, Rama, the Syrian participant, experienced a noticeable lack of almost any kind of support from her family members in relation to English language study. To exemplify the marginal place accorded to English by her family, Rama recalled that her family members did not foster an appropriate language learning environment for her language learning such as by purchasing English learning materials or creating opportunities for practising English:

I was sent to under-resourced rural schools and none of my family could speak any English...my parents were farmers...we didn't have a satellite TV or a computer in our house...I couldn't even dare to ask any of my family to finance private English tuition classes for me at university because of our bad financial situation (Transcript No. R2, 105-128).

This extract suggests that Rama ascribed this limited family involvement in her English learning to the low income and education level of her parents. Therefore, she stated that her

family members were not to blame, because they were themselves unfamiliar with schoolwork and the languages used in education (Lamb, 2012, 2013a).

6.4.1.3 Impacts of Teachers as Formal Social Agents

Intertwined with the input by some informal social networks, the findings at this stage of the research elucidate how the participants' tireless efforts to learn and use English were markedly scaffolded by the vigorous effects of some teachers in their formal educational settings. More precisely, the data suggest that the involvement of English teachers in regulating the participants' investment in learning English was underpinned at two levels: through fostering or limiting the participants' language beliefs and motivations and/or through compelling them to embrace a specific pattern of LLSs, especially the exam-oriented strategy use (Gao, 2010a; Taylor, 2013a).

The five participants who were educated in state schools during their education (Khaled, Mouza, Nasser, Rama and Jamal) expressed their dissatisfaction with, and even on occasion contempt for the English teaching methods that they were subjected to in the formal school settings of their home countries. These participants claimed that almost all of their English classes were monotonous, unchallenging, teacher-centred, focusing intensively on grammar instruction over the other language skills. Related to this, they reported that most of their English teachers had poor pronunciation, tended to use Arabic more than half the time, interacted only with students who could understand their teaching on grammar and were inclined to focus predominately on exam preparation (Esseili, 2014; Malcolm, 2013). The following interview extracts exemplify the participants' polemics on the English teaching practices in their classrooms:

In Emirates, I often used Arabic with my English teachers and classmates....my English teachers sometimes pronounced words incorrectly and I discovered that when I grew up (Transcript No. M3, 50-56).

...my English teachers in Saudi Arabia were Arabs. They taught us only from the assigned books which were the absolute standard of success or failure....they didn't invite us to work in pairs or groups (Transcript No. N2, 188-194).

Teachers in Syria focused only on excellent students who were good at grammar. Therefore, other students, specifically those in the middle or weak, like me were ignored (Transcript No. R3, 20-23).

There's a wall between my English teachers and us. The only voice heard in all my classrooms in Libya was the teacher...it was input without output. They used Arabic a lot (Transcript No. J3, 123-131).

The emphasis that the participants placed on their English teachers' incompetence seemingly aligns with Buckingham's (2003: 71) argument that 'the single most important influence on student achievement is teacher quality'. The negative perceptions that these five participants have about their own English teachers at school led some of them to form an aversion for English itself. This point aptly describes Rama's case, especially when she says:

I started as a very good student at English learning at the primary stage of schooling in Syria but after being subjected to a form of severe physical punishment from my English teacher in the intermediate school, my feelings towards English completely changed (Transcript No. R3, 41-44).

In this sense, the English teacher's rigid pattern of outward behaviour was felt by Rama to be a stumbling block in relation to her academic pursuits. Additionally, English teachers as critical agents had an inescapable impact on causing these five participants to espouse a

specific set of LLSs, principally the LLSs pertaining to improving the latter's English examination results, as can be attested in the following extracts:

Almost all my English teachers in Emirates used to teach us in the same way....after reading and translating the new reading text from stem to stern by our teacher, we had to answer the comprehension questions of the text...we had to memorise the list of vocabularies found at the end of the reading text for the exam. After my exams, I forgot not only many vocabularies that I learnt but almost everything about English (Transcript No. M3, 88-107).

Unfortunately, English teachers didn't give us any strategies that could help us write a short Essay in English. So, I had to remember all paragraphs by heart to get a good mark in the exam (Transcript No. N3, 55-57).

In every English session in Libya, we had to copy some vocabularies and grammar points from the board...all learning and teaching were only for exams (Transcript No. J3, 145-151).

The above extracts reveal that preparing students for the examinations was at the forefront of most English teachers' efforts in the Arab world (Rababah, 2005). Consequently, the participants made liberal use of repetition and memorisation strategies. The same extracts attest to the fact that many participants deemed that solely exam-oriented lessons would not avail them in developing their real English competence. Nonetheless, Khaled had positive things to say about his English teacher in the third year of secondary school. He claimed that the focus of that English teacher was not limited to rote memorisation strategies, but extended to spurring his students on to enlarge their language learning opportunities and employ alternative LLSs, especially metacognitive strategies such as checking their progress and analysing their mistakes. Since the final examination at Saudi secondary state schools was set by the Ministry of Education, Khaled acknowledged that he paid scant attention to his teacher's ardent recommendations. The following extract describes this point:

my teacher in my last year of secondary school was against everything that mainstream of English teaching in Saudi Arabia was...he kept telling us about the importance of English for our future...he encouraged us to think of our mistakes and he correct them gently. I was unlucky because he came in the decisive final year of my study... the questions were put by the Ministry of Education (Transcript No. K3, 122-141).

Unlike the other participants, Fadi and Zainab had positive experiences to share about most of their English teachers in their homeland. Drawing on the two participants' experiential accounts, they had in general real opportunities to widen their engagement with English inside the classroom, because English was the medium of instruction of many taught subjects, and these subjects were often delivered by non-Arabs. Zainab, for example, explained the practical steps taken by her teachers and school to expand her English use outside the walls of the classroom. Along with holding a Book Reading Competition in her school, Zainab mentioned that students were encouraged to join English clubs organised by the school and were visited sometimes by native speakers of English. Moreover, some home visits during the school year were recurrently conducted by Zainab's English teacher, by which it was possible to ascertain that some of her family members often used English in their daily communication with her:

...in my school, we had to make English part of our lives. I had to speak English at home for a specific period of time because my teacher would come to our house thrice a year... I liked to practise my English with my brother. He talked with my family members to ensure that they communicated in English with me. Otherwise, I had to stay at the school accommodation...we also had to read any 15 English story books within each year and during the summer, book reading competitions were held...there were exhibitions at the end of the year attended sometimes by people from Europe (Transcript No. Z2, 111-138).

In this respect, the school-family collaboration appeared to create an additional avenue for some students to practise English in out-of-classroom settings (Benson and Reinders, 2011; Palfreyman, 2014). The three participants (Khaled, Mouza and Nasser) who came from the Gulf Arab countries mentioned that although English was supposed to be a medium of teaching for many subjects, some of their university teachers were Arabs and preferred to use Arabic in their lectures. They added that the other university lecturers were from South Asia, mostly India and Pakistan, and they found no noticeable difficulty in understanding the lectures, given that the lecturers used to read from textbooks and PowerPoint slides. Nasser, for instance, echoed this point, stating that

At university, some subjects were taught by Indian lecturers...they used simple English related to my major...when I found any difficulty, I used to take notes from the PowerPoint slides of the lecture to revise the unclear ideas later...there were also some bookshops around the university. These bookshops used to sell many course-related items, including lecture notes and module guides (Transcript No. N3, 99-117).

The above discussion reveals that the participants who were educated in public educational settings were often dissatisfied with the quality of English classes in their homelands.

6.4.1.4 Relationships with Classmates

Apart from English teachers, peers are often seen to be an essential resource for the regulation of learners' strategic language efforts (e.g., Gao, 2008a; Murphey and Arao, 2001). Nonetheless, the data suggest that apart from Fadi and Zainab, the participants had little to say about their interactions with their counterparts throughout their schooling. For example, when Rama was asked about the influence of her peers on her language learning before moving to the university, she said that

My classmates and I were quite poor in English. I didn't ask them for help as I know we were all suffering. There was no motivated peer there. This was the situation of most Syrian students in the rural areas (Transcript No. R1,77-79).

As evident in this extract, the classroom environment was not supportive of collaborative learning. At university, almost all participants reported that competitive examination-oriented learning was predominant in order to win an academic scholarship. This, in turn, led the participants to continue working in an isolated manner. Zainab, for example, replicated this idea, saying:

We completed some tasks together inside the classroom...In the last two years at university; I noticed that my colleagues were reluctant to provide much help. This was because we were all concerned with our own benefits...we competed to win a scholarship (Transcript No.Z2, 152-161).

6.4.2 Impacts of the Participants' Language Learning Motivations and Beliefs on their Strategy Use

6.4.2.1 Overview

According to the simplistic duality of the instrumental/integrative distinction, individuals are motivated to learn a language because of either gaining some concrete benefits or learning for learning's sake. This instrumental/integrative distinction was based on cognitive psychology approaches, and has been criticised by some researchers (e.g. Dörnyei, 2014; Gao, 2008b; Gu, 2009; Ushioda, 2011a). Ushioda (2011a: 201), for instance, postulates that the impacts of globalisation and of internet use have led 'integrativeness' to lose 'its explanatory power', because one's integrative motivation needs to be explained according to 'desired self-

representations as de facto members of these global communities, rather than in terms of identification with external reference groups'. In this sense, English is no longer limited to Anglophone societies such as the UK or US. Additionally, the individual learning a specific language has to be portrayed as 'a person rather than as an abstract, depersonalised learner' (Ryan and Dörnyei, 2013: 91). As a result, more emphasis has been recently put on the salience of the socially constructed, dynamic nature of learners' motivation. Consequently, learners' changing motivations and beliefs affect the use of LLSs, as shown in the findings of this research stage presented in the following section.

6.4.2.2 The Participants' Motivational Discourses in their Homelands

The analysis of data shows that almost all participants were grade-conscious and competitive. They considered examinations as the fundamental artefact to determine their level of English proficiency and access to higher educational and social communities (Gao, 2008a; Shohamy, 2000). Mouza's words echoed other participants' oriented motives for learning English in their homelands, saying 'the English language is a tool to achieve our goals' (Transcript No. Z4, 77-79). In this sense, all the participants were cognizant of the instrumental values of English at different stages of their academic lives. For instance, the critical importance of English to four participants (Khaled, Mouza, Nasser and Jamal) converged at the moment of their enrolment at the university, since some of their university classes would be conducted in English. The following extracts reveal how the participants strove for examination results that met their family expectations:

...my inner voice said to me that my English level was good because my exam results were very good. However I knew I was unable to express myself well in English.

Therefore, I followed an English course before entering the university because it would be shameful if I failed in my university exams (Transcript No. N4, 14-18).

My interest in learning English was secondary. At school it was just a subject. Then it became a tool for reading medical books...I had to memorise a great deal of medical terminology such as the names of organs and instruments for the exam (Transcript No. M4, 14-18).

My father encouraged me to work hard to get a scholarship to the UK...in Libya, the best strategy to get high marks was memorisation. Therefore, I used at university to memorise English poems and essays by heart. However, I knew that this strategy wouldn't improve my English (Transcript No. J2, 22-32).

As is evident from the above interview extracts, some social agents, mainly parents and English teachers, were essential in mediating the participants' learning motivations and strategy use in this research stage.

Although the instrumental force of English up to this point constituted the dominant theme in the participants' interview transcripts, some participants especially after their going to university, displayed in some instances their intrinsic language learning motivation, which resembled 'doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable' (Malcolm, 2011: 196). For instance, Khaled was interested in listening to English music, saying 'I liked English music...I really wanted to understand what was said in English songs without looking at the lyrics' (Transcript No. K4, 77-78). Another incident was that he was interested in communicating with some speakers of English who came to Mecca in Saudi Arabia to perform Islamic rituals.

In effect, the data suggest that the three participants who studied in private formal settings (Fadi, Yazn and Zainab) showed a more intrinsic motivating force than the other participants.

The following conversation between Zainab and myself replicated the combination of extrinsic and intrinsic elements in her language learning motivations:

Zainab: I had to speak English with my peers and sometimes with my family. I also used to read English novels as I could receive some gifts from my teacher like USB memory sticks...I liked to read English poetry in summer because I was influenced by Shakespeare's poetry...my love of English increased at university when I had two Canadian teachers. I also participated in an English club when I was at school.

Interviewer: How was your participation in that club?

Zainab: it's only for a short period because my focus was on getting high marks in examinations. Otherwise, I wouldn't have been able to win the annual prize allocated to the top students (Transcript No. Z4, 195-212).

The above extract indicates that while competitive examination-oriented learning influenced Zainab's language learning efforts, she also experienced learning English as 'fun' in many diverse ways, using the Internet, novels and movies (Gillette, 1994). Yazn also reported that he used to visit some English university students living in a dormitory in addition to working voluntarily after graduation in an organisation responsible for finding accommodation for European people working in Jordan.

Unlike the other participants, an analysis of Rama's data during the time in her homeland showed that throughout her academic life in Syria, Rama 'lacked tangible evidence of the utility of English', regarding it as 'a useless requirement' that was 'extremely tedious' to accomplish (Transcript No. R3, 44-46). To support her point, Rama claimed that her main goal of learning English in Syria was to obtain the minimum pass score for compulsory English examinations, although she was outstanding in other taught subjects:

In English subject, my aim was always to gain the minimum score requirement. I found learning English very difficult no matter how hard I tried. Although the English lectures at university were boring, I used to attend them and translate the English texts

word by word. I also put some vocabulary in a specific notebook for the exam. But I forgot them as I didn't use them...English affected my grade point average (Transcript No. R3, 49-61).

This extract suggests that English took a back seat in Rama's language learning history, and her inability to recall much vocabulary might be explained by the fact that Rama was unwilling to integrate new vocabulary into some meaningful context. However, the instrumental values of English emerged in Rama's motivational processes after being assigned as a teaching assistant at one of the Syrian state universities to be sent afterwards to the UK to complete her postgraduate studies. More precisely, she was pressured into working hard at learning English to obtain a high score in TOEFL. Otherwise, she would never have been able to come to the UK. Rama made the following comment regarding this challenge:

...to get an unconditional offer from any UK universities, my score in the Paper-Based TOEFL had to be at least 550. At that time only I realised how wrong I had been when I wasn't interested in English before (Transcript No. R3, 49-61).

This extract echoes how high-stakes examinations as artefacts, in particular TOEFL, played a pivotal role in Rama's language learning investment and her underlying motivations. Therefore, Rama was willing to make the effort to attain the required score on the TOEFL test by embracing a specific set of LLSs such as downloading some English articles from the Internet and allocating two hours a day for watching some English programmes. She also bolstered a strong relationship with a Canadian lecturer, who was working in the department of English literature at Damascus University. Since Rama was unable to afford private English tuition, she exercised her agency by suggesting that she teach this Canadian colleague some Arabic in return:

After two unsuccessful trials in my TOEFL exam, I met a Canadian lecturer in the office of the dean...she accepted my offer. This offer was to teach her some Arabic

while she trained me in the TOEFL test in return...she taught me many strategies in relation to each section of this test. For example, for the reading passage, she recommended me to read the comprehension questions first and then read the passage guided by the questions...she advised me to watch English films (Transcript No. R3, 77-91).

The above discussion accords with Winke's (2005: 1) claim that learners' language learning motivation 'varies widely, ebbs and flows over the course of the year and stems from various sources, internal to the learner, external or both'.

6.4.3 Effects of Technology-Mediated Language Resources

As described in Section 6.4.1, some social agents (i.e., family members and teachers) mediated the participants' strategic language efforts in different forms such as by offering and sometimes hindering a number of technology-mediated language resources (e.g. PowerPoint, videogames and the media). The analysis of the participants' experiential accounts revealed that the use of technology inside their classrooms throughout their school education was almost absent, excluding playing cassettes occasionally. Two participants (Khaled and Mouza) indicated that their university lecturers were reluctant to introduce technologies inside the classroom or to enlighten the participants as to their availability. Addressing this point, Mouza, for instance, stated that:

Although the university library in Emirates had access to digital resources, no teacher told us about these facilities and thus I didn't make use of them...they just used the assigned books and sometimes PowerPoint for lecturers...I remembered that one teacher asked us to give him our feedback about the module on a blog...I didn't do it since it's not assessed (Transcript No. M4, 22-41).

In Nasser's case, he mentioned that he recognised the importance of technology in his academic life while writing his graduation project in Saudi Arabia, and to a lesser extent as regards downloading some English movies in his 'spare time':

I started using the Internet at University especially to download some articles for my graduation project...at school, I didn't use to surf the Internet because the dial up connection to the net was too slow...I sometimes downloaded some English movies in summer holidays and during my IELTS preparation to improve my listening skills (Transcript No. N2, 66-75).

There are also some instances mentioned by the participants that revealed their unsystematic attempts to use technology-mediated language resources beyond the classroom. For example, two participants (Fadi and Yazn) mentioned the worth of English videogames purchased by one of their family members in increasing their vocabulary repertoire, since they tended to recycle some game vocabulary during their interaction with other gamers. Yazn, for instance, recalled that he tended to use a bilingual dictionary or to turn to one of his family members when encountering new vocabulary in some videogames. Yazn explained the reasons behind his love for videogames, saying:

Playing videogames was like watching movies but the difference between the two was that in videogames I had a role in changing the story line and other elements... In games, I was the one who fought and took decisions (Transcript No. Y2, 202-207).

This extract recalls Gee's (2008: 318) argument that when playing a video game, 'players feel a real sense of agency, ownership, and control. It's their game'. Accordingly, video games as one of the technology affordances might entail a considerable amount of spoken and written English output (Stockwell, 2013).

Another finding was that two participants (Khaled and Zainab) mentioned using English as a communication medium in online chat rooms and internet messaging. For instance, Zainab

shared her reflections on the experience of opening up a conference room at yahoo messenger with some colleagues at university to work together on the assigned homework:

I had four close friends at university. We wanted to come up with something that made our homework fun. So, we created a conference room at yahoo messenger. When we had a question in our homework, each one gave his ideas...we often used English in our discussion. Sometimes I showed my answer to other members in this conference room to evaluate it before submitting my homework (Transcript No. Z2, 111-118).

This extract exemplified how online chat and conference rooms, what Palfreyman (2007: 1) calls 'virtual environments', constituted a vital tool for opening up new venues for language learning and easing the shifts between formal and informal learning contexts (Palfreyman, 2012). 'Virtual environments' enabled Zainab to espouse social and metacognitive strategies such as analysing and evaluating language learning. Khaled in turn recalled that after gaining a Master's scholarship in the UK, he started entering into Yahoo's chat rooms regularly to chat with people who had first-hand contact with the British community and culture. Commenting on this point, Khaled stated that

On one visit to the rooms listed for people living in the UK...some accepted my invitation to join in private chat...one old man was so kind. He told me about the UK such as London Eye and Heathrow airport (Transcript No. K4, 81-86).

Nonetheless, Mouza claimed that she did not like to go online to chat with foreigners because she did not have many similar interests with strangers.

The findings up to this point found that apart from Khaled and Yazn, the participants started watching English movies and programmes at a late stage of their academic lives, principally at the university level or even after graduation. Most participants were likely to watch their favourite English movies on TV channels or websites that gave subtitles in Arabic, while

preserving the original English soundtrack to grasp the plot. The following extracts taken from the participants' interview transcripts exemplified this practice:

For me, watching films was the best way to learn English especially when English subtitles were provided...I sometimes stopped the video while watching it. I did that only when I wanted to understand the plot of the film (Transcript No. Y4, 144-149).

At university, I started watching MBC2. It's the first free Channel in the Arab World that presented American films with Arabic subtitles. It helped me get acquainted with the daily lives of the native speakers of English as it's full of real dialogues (Transcript No. J4, 132-136).

In this sense, watching movies rich in authentic use of English might help language learners to improve their linguistic pitfalls such as pronunciation, and become acquainted with Western cultural values (Wang, 2012: 340-341). Related to this, watching English movies led some participants to adopt a number of new LLSs to accomplish their goals. For instance, Rama recalled that she started watching some English programmes and movies during her preparation for the TOEFL exam to improve her listening skills and to increase her vocabulary repertoire for the reading section of that exam. Addressing this goal, Rama used to jot down the new vocabulary items that she heard in English programmes in her 'vocabulary notebook' after checking their spelling from an English-Arabic dictionary:

As there's no satellite TV in our house, I watched some English shows on Channel2 of terrestrial Syrian television...I drew a two-column table with long rows on my vocabulary notebook to type down the new vocabulary that I heard on these shows...I checked the spelling of new words in the Oxford English-Arabic Dictionary (Transcript No. R2, 91-101).

Two participants (Jamal and Khaled) also expressed their passions for listening to English music as a purposeful learning strategy to expand their exposure to English input and

accumulate their repository of vocabulary items and phrases. Echoing this point, Jamal explained that

When I became a student in the English department, I started listening to English songs. I loved Celine Dion's songs. With her songs lyrics found in some websites, I sometimes put new words and phrases in my notebook to lodge them in my memory (Transcript No. J3, 94-97).

Surprisingly, perhaps, the participants' use of some Web 2.0 technologies (i.e., blogs, Facebook, Skype, YouTube, Twitter and wikis) to improve their English during their stay in their homelands was found to be fairly limited. For some participants (Fadi, Jamal, Rama, and Zainab), the political factor might have had a prominent role to play in this finding, on the grounds that some popular social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, Skype and YouTube) were blocked in their countries. For instance, Rama said that 'I actually didn't know about Facebook or YouTube before my coming to the UK' (Transcript No. R3, 157). Nonetheless, Yazn, the Jordanian participant, recalled the experience of improving his skills in playing guitar through watching some YouTube guitar video lessons in English in his 'spare time':

I used to teach myself how to play guitar from free English video lessons on YouTube...I also used to upload some videos of my playing to get feedback from others. However, I gave up my guitar at university because this slowed down my achievement (Transcript No. Y4, 66-69).

In effect, Yazn's decision to stop playing guitar in order not to affect passively his academic progress might imply that there was a gap between Yazn's learning in in-school and out-of school contexts. This point will be explained in the Discussion chapter.

The interview data up to this stage also suggested the limited impact of mobile phones on the participants' LLS use and development before their arrival in the UK. Most participants did not own a mobile phone before entering the university. However, Mouza referred to the value

of installing a medical dictionary on her mobile phone during her work at one of the state hospitals, given that she had to write prescriptions in English only. In this respect, Mouza declared that:

The electronic dictionary on my mobile phone availed me during my night-time work period in hospital...it helped me check the spelling and pronunciation of some medical terms while writing prescriptions for appropriate medications (Transcript No. M2, 29-35).

It may be inferred that the installation of an electronic dictionary on her mobile device encouraged Mouza to activate some cognitive and affective strategies such as making a visual and auditory representation of sounds or words (i.e., pronunciation and intonation) to make up for the inadequate repertoire of some medical vocabulary. The two Saudi participants (Khaled and Nasser) recounted their experiences of using the Atlas English-Arabic electronic dictionary during their attendance at the university in which English was the medium of instruction of some subjects. Unlike Khaled, Nasser expressed his dissatisfaction with the use of such kinds of electronic dictionaries, given that ‘they often did not accurately depict the word’s meaning and use’ (Transcript No. N4, 177).

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the findings of the first research stage, and aims to understand the eight participants’ developmental processes in terms of their language learning experiences and their LLS use before coming to the UK. Exam-oriented strategies were used heavily by the participants (especially those who attended state-funded public schools), and these strategies were basically scaffolded by their contextual realities, including social and material affordances (e.g. teachers’ teaching practices, parents’ involvement, and the availability of

technologies), along with their motivational orientations and other factors such as politics. The findings of the first stage of data analysis will serve as a baseline for comparison with the findings obtained from the other three stages described in the forthcoming Chapter. The discussion of the findings at this research stage will be presented in Chapter 8.

CHAPTER 7 THE PARTICIPANTS' LANGUAGE STRATEGY USE in GREAT BRITAIN

7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter described the participants' past language learning experiences and their strategic language efforts prior to coming to the UK. The participants' strategy use, in particular their use of exam-oriented strategies in learning English, was ostensibly internalised by the contextual realities of their homelands. Related to this, a dissonance between most participants' language learning in in-school and out-of-school contexts was manifested through, for instance, using assessment as a means of control, and giving a less than central position to the potential of integrating technology-mediated language resources into English classes to regulate the participants' investment in learning English.

The findings of the first research stage constituted a benchmark by which to compare the findings of the subsequent three stages presented in this chapter. These three stages explained the participants' strategy repertoire and the dynamic processes underlying their strategy use during their entire stay in the UK (i.e., between 9 July 2012 and 28 November 2013). In doing so, the complexity, dynamism and a holistic portrait of the participants' LLS use and their identity development according to the situated learning contexts may be better captured.

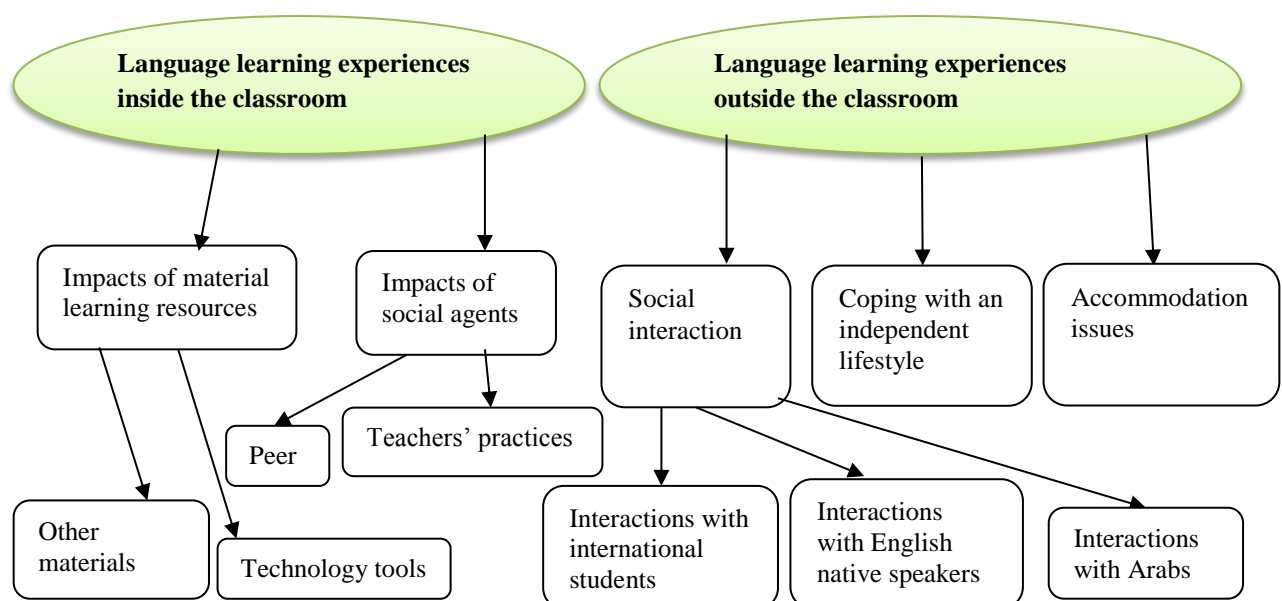
7.2 Findings of the Second Stage: Pre-sessional English Course (9 July-24 September 2012)

7.2.1 Overview

As illustrated in Chapter 4 (Section 4.2.3.1), all participants undertook a pre-sessional English course (ten weeks) before joining their postgraduate programmes in the UK. The reasons for their attendance on the course were principally to obtain additional training in English and/or to adjust themselves to the changed circumstances. Only two participants (Rama and Zainab) were obliged to take this pre-sessional course as a prerequisite to obtaining an unconditional offer for their MA programmes. Notably, Zainab did not prepare well for the IELTS exam, due to the unexpected death of her father three months before her coming to the UK.

Since this was to be their first time travelling abroad, most participants were ill-prepared to cope with the cultural differences and second language learning or use, as will be explained in the forthcoming section (Benson et al., 2013; Kinginger, 2013). The thematic map of the second research stage is as below:

Figure 10: Thematic map of the Second Research Stage



7.2.2 The Participants' Challenges and Strategy Use in Informal Settings

As described in Chapter 4, some research methods such as learner diaries and email exchanges were used at this stage to help the researcher construct the interview questions. Surprisingly, perhaps, most of the participants' diary entries collected during this stage were pertinent to their out-of-class activities. When asked about the primary reasons for focusing more on the extramural activities in their diaries, Fadi's words echoed other participants' experiences, saying 'it's inevitable that individuals who left their homelands for the first time to study abroad would undergo many difficulties to get used to the host culture, climate and lifestyle. Besides, the pre-sessional course wasn't hard' (Transcript No. F6, 28-31).

7.2.2.1 Coping with an Independent Lifestyle

The analysis of data showed that in the first three months of staying in the UK, the participants' personal independence was reinforced through their endeavours to meet personal life needs, such as buying halal food (i.e. food void of pork products consumed by Muslims) and household goods, opening a bank account, and searching for prepaid SIM cards to make overseas calls. The advantages of becoming more independent in the UK were seen at both a personal and linguistic level, because they needed to use English across different non-academic settings to mediate their daily life hassles (Benson et al, 2012: 186-187). The following examples taken from the diary entries of three participants (Nasser, Mouza and Rama) clarified their strategy use in confronting some challenges in out-of-class contexts:

Last week, I received a call from the bank to verify some of my details. The agent was talking fast first. I asked him to slow down. I felt embarrassed because I asked him to repeat four times on the question related to the date of my birth. I didn't get much of

his speech. I need to work on my listening skill by listening to radio, for instance (Nasser, diary, 16th July 2012).

Two days ago, I went to the shop to buy my breakfast. I wanted 'cheese spread'. I approached a scarf-wearing woman thinking that she's an Arab. But I discovered that she was Asian. I forgot all English. So I used my body language to show her what I needed (Rama, diary, 14th July 2012).

I wanted to prepare a kind of dessert. I went to buy the ingredients. One of them was 'starch'. First, I searched for this word in the electronic dictionary installed on my iPhone. I felt embarrassed because I pronounced the word 'starch' incorrectly and the lady working there didn't get what I needed. The problem was solved when I played the audio pronunciation (Mouza, diary, 22nd July 2012).

As is evident in the above diary entries, the participants used some LLSs to compensate for their inadequate repertoire of English vocabulary and inaccurate pronunciation. Three participants (Fadi, Yazn and Zainab) reported that they were capable of expressing themselves well in English since their arrival in the UK. Nonetheless, they were sometimes linguistically hindered by some local expressions and slang uttered by other people, while meeting the essentials of their personal lives. In the following conversation between Zainab and myself, Zainab described two incidents that revealed the lack of help she received from her classmates in finding out about some places to shop, along with her inadequate knowledge of varieties of English:

Zainab: In the first month of my stay in the UK, I bought everything from an expensive store. Some students accidentally said that prices were lower at another store. But nobody would say where it was. And I became angry.

Interviewer: what did you do then?

Zainab: I put it in the Google Maps and then I found it.

Interviewer: Any other difficulties?

Zainab: ...three days ago I went with another Iraqi lady to a restaurant which offered halal food. The accent of the lady working there was difficult to be understood. We

didn't understand at the beginning where we had to sit. I asked her to repeat twice... I needed to learn more about different accents in the UK (Transcript No. Z6, 56-79).

It may be inferred from the above discussion that the pressure the participants experienced brought them gains in relation to independence and decision-making ability, along with enlightening them as to the benefits of technologies to regulate their extramural activities (Montgomery, 2010).

7.2.2.2 Accommodation Issues

In terms of residence, all the participants, excluding Mouza and Jamal, were living on the university campus. The participants were content with the physical conditions of their campus accommodation, including gas, internet and telephone services. However, a number of challenges associated with the social environment of accommodation were articulated by some participants. Five participants (Fadi, Nasser, Rama, Yazn and Zainab) expressed their astonishment, and to a lesser extent frustration, at living only with Asian students because this matter, as they claimed, constituted a potential barrier to improving their English level and understanding of the host culture (Trice, 2007). The following interview extracts epitomise this point:

When I came to the UK and found all my flatmates were Asians, I was a bit depressed. It's sometimes hard to understand them when they speak English. I expected to see many Britons living on campus and that my English would become like native speakers (Transcript No. N5, 112-114).

Most of my flatmates were Chinese. They only used their mother language in their communication. When I saw anyone of them in the kitchen, all I could say was *Hello!* and *See you later!* (Transcript No. R6, 88-91).

Zainab, the Iraqi participant, went further, claiming that her sporadic communication with some flatmates made her English deteriorate because of their inaccurate pronunciation and insufficient repertoire of English vocabulary. Zainab made the following comment regarding this point:

I spoke slowly with my flatmates. This made me feel my English get worse...I had to use simple words with them. And if one didn't practise the less common vocabulary, she would forget them (Transcript No. Z5, 34-41).

In addition to Zainab's use of some cognitive strategies such as using synonyms and saying something simpler, the above extract included references to her awareness of the importance of a 'learning by doing' philosophy by acknowledging the importance of using the new words in her daily life to maintain them (Gillette, 1994).

Unlike the other participants, Khaled reported that he was equipped with some information about student life in Britain before coming to the UK from previous Saudi individuals who had studied in UK universities. Khaled said that

Before arrival in the UK, I met three Saudis who studied in the UK. They told me the Chinese represented the dominant group in the UK universities. So, I expected to meet many Asians on campus and in my class as well (Transcript No. K5, 92-94).

This finding aligns with Jackson's (2008: 222) argument that before leaving for any study abroad, students need to be enlightened regarding the challenges that they might face in the host country, in order to 'bolster their self-confidence and reduce their anxieties'. As regards Jamal, he was satisfied with living off-campus with two other Libyan students in the first three months of his time in the UK.

7.2.2.3 Social Interaction outside the Classroom

The data analysis at this research stage show that the participants felt disillusioned because they expected to befriend British nationals from the moment of arrival to the UK, and that their English would improve automatically. They attributed the difficulty of establishing interpersonal bonds with the British to three reasons: an imperfect knowledge of the English language (Jamal, Nasser, Mouza and Rama), the nature of the pre-sessional English course designed for international students and the scarcity of British students living on campus (all participants). The following interview extracts explain this point:

My expectation about life in the UK was 180 degrees different. I thought I would have seen just the British and my English would be improved automatically by speaking English for 24 hours a day... both my classmates and flatmates were Asians too (Transcript No. R5, 144-148).

I'm able to communicate in English. But I wanted to mix with British residents to learn the British English slang and to know more about their culture...almost all people around the university were international students. (Transcript No. F5, 24-29).

In this sense, most participants shared one of the main features of being 'a good language learner' mentioned by Joan Rubin (1975: 46), namely their willingness to use English in real communication.

The data also show that four participants (Fadi, Jamal, Rama and Yazn) mentioned some strategies used by the university they attended at to enhance their knowledge and experience of British culture through, for instance, organising some free weekend trips to places of cultural interest such as Warwick Castle, Oxford and London. In addressing this point, Jamal, for instance, divulged that although these trips increased his cultural awareness of the UK, they did not lead to a noticeable improvement in his English capabilities, because he was surrounded by his Asian classmates during these trips. Jamal said that

As it's my first time to be away from Libya, I enjoyed seeing the amazing landscape of Britain and knowing more about its history...I stayed lonely there since the Chinese spoke their mother language all the time (Transcript No. J5, 55-46).

Considering the eight cases in this longitudinal research, Fadi was likely to have more interaction with locals than the other participants up to this stage of data analysis, given that he followed a training programme in a dental office for three weeks to become a member of the General Dental Council as a prerequisite to joining his postgraduate programme in Implant Dentistry. Commenting on this point, Fadi stated that

I joined a training programme before the start of my postgraduate course in London...I watched the dentists working in the dental centre how they treated and dealt with their patients...I learnt some slang words from the patients. For example, yesterday I learnt 'gnasher snatcher' is British slang for a dentist (Transcript No. F7, 44-63).

The data analysis at this stage of the research reveals that the participants' strongest network was their co-national network, including Arab postgraduate students and their family members back home. Given the inadequate opportunities available to the participants to socialise with native speakers of English, they were in a great need to consult their Arab nationals on their personal and emotional issues (Allen, 2013; Montgomery and McDowell, 2009). Despite the advantages of establishing strong ties with Arab friends in the UK, Jamal wrote an entry in his diary about a distressing incident that he experienced with his two Libyan flatmates:

As we were all English majors in the flat, I suggested last week that we had to converse just in English together. They refused my offer and said that they wanted just to use Arabic in our everyday conversation. They accused me of being arrogant. Therefore, I decided to use only Arabic with them. (Jamal, diary, 8th August 2012)

In effect, Jamal's use of English with their Arab fellows in informal settings was seen by them as 'an intrusion or challenge to their ingroup affiliation' (Jackson, 2008: 120). Notably, all participants maintained their ties with their immediate family members back home, by using diverse technological communication means, principally mobile phones and instant messaging conversations.

7.2.3 Contextual Mediation on the Participants' Strategy Use in Formal Settings

This section describes the participants' linguistic challenges and their strategy use inside the classroom, taking into account the mediation of different social realities, including social resources (e.g., English tutors and classmates) and material resources (e.g., technologies).

7.2.3.1 English Tutors as Formal Mediating Agents

As described in Chapter 4, international students who attended the pre-session course were divided into nine groups and for each group, there were two academic tutors. The first concentrated on helping students improve their skills in reading and writing for academic studies. These classes were called Text-based Study (TBS) classes. The second academic tutor was responsible for helping students to speak clearly and to listen effectively. This section will show how the English tutors mediated the participants' language motivations, along with some other strategies which were intended to help them in their MA programmes, principally those related to reading and writing skills such as paraphrasing, summarising, referencing, avoiding plagiarism and skimming and scanning.

7.2.3.2 Relationship between Participants and their Tutors

The data disclose that almost all the participants articulated a sharp contrast between the relationship that they had with their English teachers in their home countries and those who taught them on the pre-sessional course. Five participants (Jamal, Khaled, Nasser, Mouza and Rama) mentioned that their tutors in the pre-sessional course were less authoritative and much more available to help them both inside and outside the classroom through emails, for instance (Sovic, 2013). Jamal, for instance, made the following comment:

The practice of calling tutors by their first names was new to me. Tutors here were much friendlier than in Libya...they encouraged us to speak and they respected us and our ideas (Transcript No. J7, 55-62).

This extract signifies the potential for removing the ‘communication wall’ (Taylor, 2013a: 52) between teachers and their students to increase the academic engagement and well-being of students. In this sense, the participants’ social strategies and their talking time inside the classroom were increased in response to their tutors’ apparent behaviour. It also emerges from the analysis of the data that all participants preferred their tutors to be native speakers of English (NSOE) over the non-native ones on the pre-sessional course. Mouza’s words echoed other participants’ oriented motives for being taught only by NSOE, stating that

We are here in Britain to capture the true pronunciation of English. I was lucky since my two tutors were British, especially as my classmates were Asians...my Arab teachers used to pronounce words incorrectly (Transcript No. M6, 122-128).

In this sense, the participants’ position might be the outcome of their negative experiences with some Arab teachers of English in their homelands.

7.2.3.3 Tutors' practices inside the classroom

➤ Impacts of speaking and listening tutors' practices

The participants declared that their speaking and listening tutor used to assign two English movies for them to watch on the BBC iPlayer each week, in addition to asking them to listen to English radio at least half an hour a day. They added that they had to discuss in the class with both their classmates and tutors the things that they had watched and listened to, such as the major characters and plot development in the movies, along with the new vocabulary that they faced. Surprisingly, perhaps, only two participants (Rama and Zainab) claimed that they took these requirements seriously. This finding may be partially attributed to the fact that they were the only two participants who were obliged to take this pre-session course as a prerequisite to obtaining an unconditional offer for their MA programmes. The following extracts exemplify this idea:

We were asked to listen to 30 minutes of radio each day as homework. The tutor also specified two movies a week. We had to watch them and take notes such as what was new about the movie. The problem was that these movies were only available on the iPlayer BBC...they sometimes disappeared if I was late in watching them. And it happened to me twice (Transcript No. Z8, 71-90).

I watched most movies assigned by my tutor because it was a part of the final assessment... I didn't like some movies because I liked only dramas such as *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*...I watched them more than once to understand because of my poor English (Transcript No. R7, 54-77).

In this sense, genuine endeavours were made by the tutors to create a bridge between inside and outside classroom (Palfreyman, 2012). They also passed on some effective strategies such as listening to English radio and watching English movies (i.e., cognitive strategies), learning new vocabulary in some meaningful context and planning for a language task (i.e., metacognitive strategies) and cooperating with others (i.e., social strategies).

Five participants (Fadi, Jamal, Nasser, Yazn and Zainab) reported that they wanted to be given the chance to choose the movies that they liked to watch and discuss these in the classroom. Consequently, three participants (Fadi, Khaled and Yazn) indicated that although they were still deploying their past LLS of watching English movies and programmes in the UK, they preferred to see different kinds of English movies and series such as *How I Met your Mother* and *Rules of Engagement*. Nonetheless, these two participants showed an improvement in the use of the same LLS, because they started training themselves to watch English programmes without English subtitles.

The data analysis also shows that the tutors of listening and speaking skills tried to improve the participants' self-confidence and oral proficiency through asking them to deliver a short presentation collaboratively, using PowerPoint. Two participants (Khaled and Zainab) reported that they conveyed their oral presentations successfully and received positive feedback from their tutors, given that they prepared very well for it. For instance, Zainab attributed this success to the strategies that she had already learnt from her university teacher in Iraq. Zainab added that she organised the material to fit the time allowed and followed a process of outlining, elaborating and simplifying. However, she was reluctant to work with her Asian classmates in the same group, because they were not sufficiently cooperative:

I started preparing for the presentation immediately after being told by my tutor. It was about animal rights. We went to the city centre and spoke to people. It took too much time when I did it with three of my Asian classmates. They were unwilling to work their parts and wanted me to conduct all interviews. I said to them we were here to exercise our English...my tutor praised my English but he said that my physical movement was slow (Transcript No. Z8, 138-155).

Unlike all the other participants, Rama was the only one who was displeased with her progress in relation to presentation skills, in spite of her tireless efforts. She attributed this matter to her imperfect language proficiency level. She said that

In my presentation, the tutor was unhappy with my performance. He said I was nervous. I felt depressed when my classmates thought that I was talking about a different topic...some Arabic words were unconditionally used by me during the presentation (Transcript No. R7, 22-31).

The data also reveal that four participants (Khaled, Jamal, Mouza and Zainab) believed that more time had to be devoted in the pre-sessional course to improve their listening skills. Nasser, for instance, declared that

We didn't listen a lot to tapes in the class. We did that by ourselves as homework. When I did it alone, I paused the tape whenever I couldn't understand the dialogue and played it again. And this didn't help me (Transcript No. N7, 121-123).

➤ **Impacts of Reading and Writing Tutors' Practices**

The analysis of the participants' experiential accounts reveals that the writing and reading tutors scaffolded the participants' academic skills principally from three points of view: 1) learning an outline plan or basic elements of essay structure i.e., an introduction, body and a conclusion, 2) discrete elements of language and academic style, such as writing summaries, formal vocabulary or hedging and 3) finding resources, making referencing and avoiding plagiarism (Górska, 2013). Almost all the participants reported that they were satisfied with the academic writing support that they received from their tutors, taking into account the limited duration of the pre-sessional course and the inadequate provision for writing academic texts in their homelands. They claimed that they gave paramount importance to

developing their writing skills in this course, on the grounds that academic writing requirements would constitute the essential form of assessment in their MA programmes. When asked about their perceptions of the writing and reading tutors taught in the pre-session course, they tended to draw comparisons between what they were learning about academic writing in the UK and that in their homestays. These comparisons enabled the researcher not only to gain a better understanding of the participants' language experiences in the UK, but also to validate their language learning accounts in the first research stage. The participants made the following comments:

I got a bachelors' degree in English literature. But my writing skill still wasn't good enough because I used to study from ready-made notes for the university exams in Libya...the tutor here taught us some writing strategies such as how to avoid plagiarism through making citing and referencing (Transcript No. J7, 39-46).

My graduation project in Saudi Arabia was in English but I used to copy information from books without referencing...I think the written project was the best thing I did here so far for my MA assignments...the tutor taught us how to find resources for our project topics from the library catalogue and how to use the reference list and other things (Transcript No. N8, 99-113).

Our tutor taught us first how to make a summary of the text...first I took notes while reading the text. Then, I put one or two sentences that expressed the idea of the whole paragraph. Finally, I used some linking words to enhance cohesion such as conversely, consequently and to conclude...I recently knew that plagiarism means cheating. To avoid it, I learnt I had to change the tense of the sentence, to use synonyms and to mention the original source (Transcript No. Y6, 122-135).

The above interview extracts indicate that all participants responded positively to the writing strategies taught by their tutors, and they showed signs of their recognition of the fact that changing motivations might have required embracing different learning strategies (Lantolf and Pavlenko, 2001).

The data also show that six participants (Fadi, Khaled, Mouza, Nasser, Rama and Yazn) expressed their dissatisfaction with the lack of attention given to the skill of grammar inside the classroom. They added that the written feedback of their tutors on their papers focused mainly on content, without identifying their grammatical mistakes. Rama, for instance, explained this point, saying:

I sometimes made many grammatical and punctuation mistakes in my written papers. The teacher often ignored them, since her focus often was on my ideas...she told us that grammar was a self-study skill, giving us some online references (Transcript No. R7, 38-43).

7.2.3.4 Mediating Agents: Peers

As illustrated in Chapter 6, most participants had little to say about their interactions with their counterparts in their homelands, given that the classroom environment was basically teacher-centred. The data analysis of this stage also shows a slight influence of classmates on the participants' language learning processes, albeit there were serious attempts made by the tutors on the pre-sessional course to encourage the participants to take control of their own learning, and interact with their peers. Many participants attributed this finding to their distrust of the feedback received from their fellow students, considering that their peers were not more knowledgeable than themselves in providing sensible feedback, especially as they came from international backgrounds (Carson and Nelson, 1996). Fadi and Mouza echoed this point, stating that

The collaborative activities assigned by our tutors made learning more fun for me. However, I often didn't take them seriously. I appreciated my colleagues' suggestions but they weren't so helpful compared to the tutor's comments (Transcript No. F7, 66-68).

It's useful to exchange my ideas with my classmates. These activities reduced the feeling of boredom that I used to experience in Emirates...since most classmates here were Chinese, they sometimes used their first language during the discussion...their pronunciation wasn't sometimes accurate (Transcript No. M8, 121-145).

The above extracts suggest that the participants' use of LLSs inside the classroom, specifically the social ones, might have been discouraged due to the absence of native English students to practise their English with. Fadi gave some suggestions to overcome this problem, such as by inviting some British postgraduate students to the class or through offering some chances to international students to visit British families on weekends.

7.2.3.5 Impacts of Material Language Resources: Application of Technology

As described in Chapter 6, technology-mediated learning resources used by the participants during their time in their homelands were found to be reasonably limited, and were often practised outside the classroom such as playing videogames and watching English programmes 'in spare time'. Upon their arrival to the UK, almost all the participants reported that they started doing most of their academic work on or near a computer. For example, all of them mentioned that they had installed electronic dictionaries on their laptops in addition to the use of Microsoft Word's spell checker and thesaurus when writing their homework or research project. The UK University where the participants were attending, including the tutors' practices, played a pivotal role in expanding their awareness to the importance of technologies as an essential part of their learning (Gao, 2003). When asked about their perceptions of the language learning resources available to them on the pre-session course,

most participants drew comparisons between the classroom environment on this course and that in their homelands:

The technological facilities supplied in this course were similar to those in Emirati universities. In Emirates, teachers were unwilling to use them...their focus was on the assigned textbooks... the tutor here sometimes played YouTube Videos in the class. They also gave us tens of useful free websites to improve our English along with colourful handouts (Transcript No. M6, 67-88).

In Jordan, the university teachers sometimes used PowerPoint in the classroom...our reading tutor here gave us some websites that provided numerous news items. Each news item was also accompanied by an audio track. So, one could develop his listening and reading skills together...we also deposited our homework in a shared folder in Dropbox with our writing tutor (Transcript No. Y7, 167-178).

In Libya, my teachers didn't use any technology. After coming to the UK, I noticed that technologies were used heavily here...I needed to check my emails frequently...the tutors also played videos in the class...the timetable of my MA programme was available online (Transcript No. J5, 79-91).

The above extracts reveal the increased integration of technologies into the participants' conceptualisation of language learning. These technologies were internalised by some social networks, namely the tutors on the pre-sessional course.

7.2.2 Summary of the Findings of Second Stage

The above discussion has depicted the process of changes in the participants' strategic language efforts to handle the linguistic and sociocultural challenges that they confronted in the first three months of their time in the UK. The findings suggest that the superficiality of the participants' interactions with non-Arabs in this stage left most of them frustrated, as they

had expected to construct strong relationships with the British immediately, and that their English would be improved spontaneously (Ryan and Mercer, 2011). However, their extramural activities to meet their daily needs provided them with some opportunities to use English, and sometimes pushed them to embrace or reactivate a specific set of LLSs. For instance, Nasser and Mouza used the electronic dictionary installed on their mobile phone devices to compensate for their inadequate level of English proficiency. Another example was that Fadi was pleased to learn some slang terms related to his field from some British patients in a short training programme such as ‘gnasher snatcher’ for ‘a dentist’ and ‘a cap’ for ‘a crown’. Yazn also attended a musical play for a British rock band, which he had been keen on since he was in Jordan.

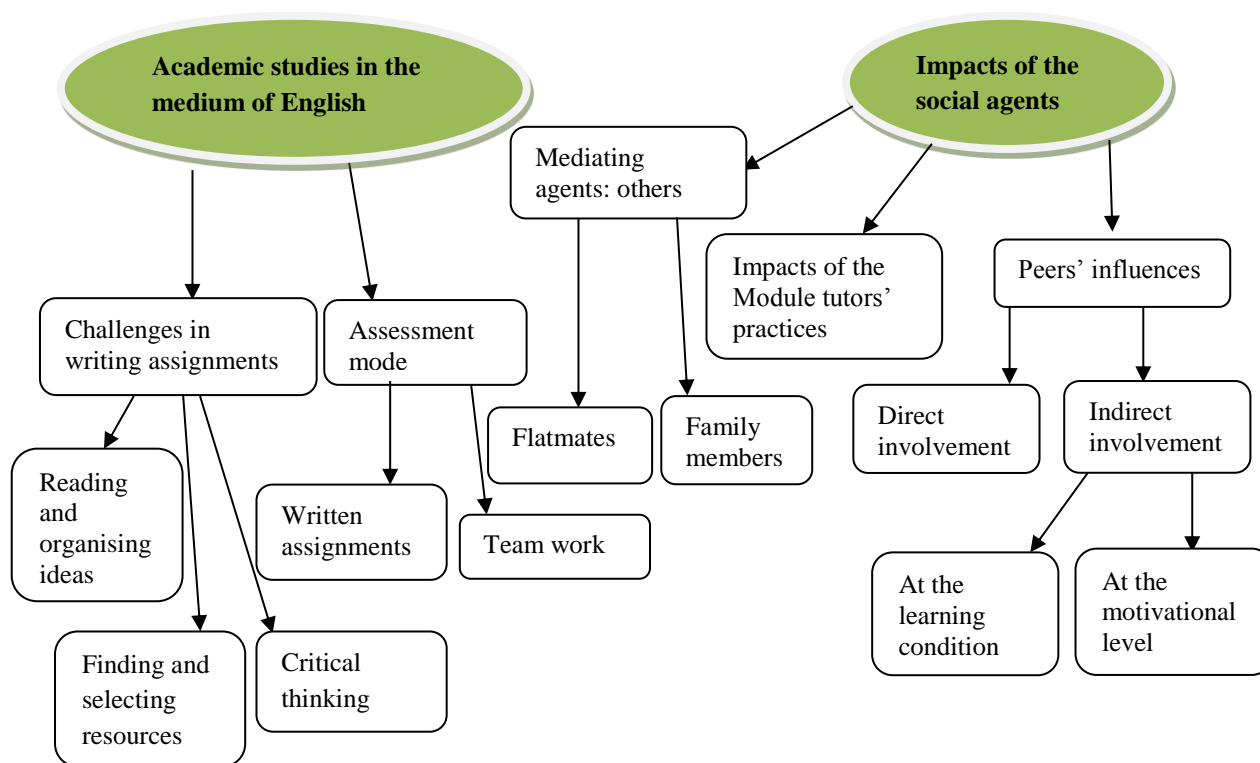
One of the interesting findings gained from the second research stage was that four participants (Fadi, Khaled, Yazn and Zainab) displayed an improvement in their use of the same LLS, namely watching English movies and programmes. Rather than watching English programmes on channels that provided Arabic subtitles, they began using either English subtitles or nothing to watch these programmes. Furthermore, there were shifts in the strategies used by the participants for dealing with the new vocabularies. For example, almost all participants claimed that they started to use the context to guess the meanings of new vocabularies. The reviewing or rote learning strategies were decreasingly used in the new context, mainly because of the changing mode of assessment. The participants also greatly valued the writing strategies that they learnt on this course such as finding resources, making referencing and avoiding plagiarism, given that academic writing requirements would constitute the essential form of assessment in their MA programmes.

7.3 Findings of the Third Stage: First and Second Semesters of Master's Studies (1 October 2012-28 April 2013)

7.3.1 Introduction

The third research stage focuses on the participants' language learning experiences, particularly in terms of their strategy use and motivational discourses, in the first and second terms of their MA programmes. This stage of data analysis represented a critical part of the study because it gave us greater depth and insights into the snapshots of the complexity and dynamism of the participants' LLS use and of their identity development. Given that the main reason for the participants' coming to the UK was to obtain academic qualifications through the medium of English, their experimental accounts during this stage largely concentrated on the LLSs they deployed to manage a new demand, namely, coursework assessment in English. Accordingly, seeking out authentic opportunities to practise their English in non-academic settings came to occupy a secondary position for most participants at this research stage. Related to this, shifts were noticed in the importance of the social and material learning resources, along with their motivational forces in internalising the participants' learning process, as will be discussed in the forthcoming sections. The thematic map of this research stage is as follows:

Figure 11: Thematic map of the third stage of data analysis



7.3.2 Impacts of Social Agents on the Participants

7.3.2.1 Overview

This section explores how a host of social agents mediated the participants' language learning and strategy use after the start of their MA programmes, as reflected in the qualitative data. In the first research stage, parents and English teachers were the most prominent figures in influencing the participants' strategic language efforts. However, the data analysis at the second research stage shows that tutors constituted the most significant agents to the participants at the academic level, whereas their Arab fellows' support was basically confined to increasing the participants' morale. At this research stage, peers emerged as the most

prominent agents in helping participants to internalise their strategic language learning efforts at both academic and non-academic levels.

7.3.2.2 Mediating Agents: Peers

The analysis of the participants' experiential accounts reveals that three participants (Fadi, Yazn and Zainab) mentioned that they consolidated their interest in the English language itself through their dynamic interaction with some of their peers. Zainab, for instance, reported that one of her Indian classmates was a poet and became a valuable source of encouragement for her to read more widely in poetry along with composing some poems in English by herself. Zainab stated that

...my interest in English poetry increased after reading many poems written by my Indian classmate...poetry taught me to think of the hidden meaning of the poem and to learn new vocabularies in context...I also knew more about English culture. I recently wrote two short poems and my colleague was impressed by them...However, I was not sure if this would help me in my academic study (Transcript No. Z5, 79-91).

This extract displays how reading and composing poetry in English led Zainab to use some LLSs such as cooperating with proficient users of English, developing cultural understanding and becoming cognisant of others' thoughts and feelings (i.e., social strategies), along with identifying the purpose of reading/writing poetry (i.e., metacognitive strategies) .

Regarding Fadi, he moved to London to start his MA programme in Implant Dentistry. His postgraduate programme was essentially assessed according to field work experience, in the sense that two out of three written assignments were based on the twenty cases that he diagnosed and treated during his work at hospital. Fadi reported that he valued the support

that he received from his British colleagues at hospital, given that most of them had already been working at the hospital for at least two years, and they were more familiar with both medical terminology and the colloquial English used by many patients. The following extract explains this idea:

In the first two months of my working here, I paid attention to my British colleagues' ways of diagnosing and explaining the treated cases to their patients...some medical terms weren't understood by some patients. So I had to explain their situations in a simple way...one of my British colleagues recommended me to say 'stitches' instead of 'sutures' to patients. I also learnt new colloquial words and phrases such as 'blowing your nose'...some patients' accents were difficult to understand. In this case, I asked my colleagues to help me or I typed the difficult words uttered by the patient on my mobile phone to look them up (Transcript No. F10, 88-123).

This extract depicts how Fadi exercised his agency to overcome the linguistic and academic difficulties that he confronted while working at the hospital (Mercer, 2012). He deployed some LLSs regulated by his colleagues in the workplace, such as paying attention to situational details (i.e., metacognitive strategies) and asking questions and cooperating with others (i.e., social strategies).

As regards Yazn, he indicated that his opportunities to use English increased after strengthening his relationship with one of his German classmates, who also introduced him to her European friends. Echoing this point, Yazn said that

...this relationship pushed me to use English more spontaneously. If I didn't understand any word or idea, I asked her...I improved my relationship with her European friends as well...both of us had similar interests in watching English movies. We also used to go to study in the library together and we helped each other in two assignments (Transcript No. Y9, 45-62).

Accordingly, Yazn's German classmate was seen to be a supportive social resource that enabled him to improve his fluency in English and develop his social networks while studying in the UK. Notably, Fadi and Yazn were more satisfied than all the other participants with their academic, personal and social achievements in the UK. Being extroverts might be seen as one of the distinguishing characteristics of these two participants.

The data also suggest that the participants received varying degrees of academic support from their peers, primarily in terms of the mediation of learning technology resources. For instance, Khaled reported that he started using the Mendeley Desktop in his study at the end of the first term of his MA course after being recommended by his Chinese classmate. For Khaled, this programme saved his time and effort, because it helped him manage and store references along with generating bibliographies and in-text citations. He declared that in his last two written assignments, he used the Mendeley Desktop to annotate PDFs i.e., adding highlights and notes to documents. To support his argument, Khaled stated that

...my Chinese classmate advised me to use Mendeley...I was able to have many pdfs on my desktop into Mendeley with full bibliographic entries for each...I no longer needed to write the references manually. Besides, I used it when I needed an in-text citation while writing my assignments...I recently found out how I could take notes on the same PDF rather than on papers as I used to do in my previous assignments...my study became more organised (Transcript No. K10, 121-132).

This extract uncovers how different contextual affordances worked together. That is, the Mendeley Desktop which was considered as a mediating artefact, was mediated by a social figure, namely a Chinese student. In similar ways, a couple of participants (Nasser and Yazn) reported that they were encouraged by Khaled to install the Mendeley programme on their laptops. They used this programme at the end of the second term of their MA course in order

to manage their documents and references and to search in documents for a specific term. Nasser, for instance, said that

In the pre-sessional course, I learnt how to cite references manually. However, I made some mistakes in using references in my written assignments. Last week Khaled advised me to download Mendeley onto my laptop...It helped me not only in referencing but also in organising my files...I marked the important documents with the star icon. It would help me a lot in my MA dissertation (Transcript No. N11, 67-88).

In this sense, the Arab students' academic support and encouragement to each other became more crystallised at this research stage.

Zainab declared that she followed her Bangladeshi classmate's advice to save all her work online on both Dropbox and SkyDrive. Zainab added that her Colombian classmate taught her the strategy of drawing mind maps using the Mindjet software programme to help her 'capture, organise and visually prioritise the main themes of an assignment question faster and smarter' (Transcript No. Z9, 79-80). It may be inferred from the above discussion that the participants, to a greater or lesser extent, exhibited a willingness to alter their learning strategies in response to the changing learning contexts and learning goals. This matter was made manifest through the increased incorporation of technology learning resources into their academic and daily lives in the UK (Gao, 2013a).

The data analysis also reveals that some of the participants' peers showed their readiness to become involved directly in mediating the participants' academic learning through proofreading some parts of their written assignments or providing the feedback given by their tutors on their own assignments. For instance, a couple of participants (Jamal and Zainab) mentioned that they solicited every possible support from their classmates after getting lower than expected marks in their assignments in the first term of their MA courses. They noted

that the process of writing assignments was more than just putting words onto paper and composing grammatical sentences, on the grounds that the major criticism that they often received from their tutors on their papers was related to ‘the lack of critical thinking’. Consequently, they attempted to read the papers of their most able counterparts in order to learn from them. The following extracts gleaned from the interview transcripts of Jamal and Zainab elucidate this idea:

In Libya, I used to get high marks by memorising my teachers’ words...in my previous assignments, I got the same feedback ‘your work is more descriptive than critical’...my grades ranged from C to B-. Two students who got a Distinction in their assignments allowed me to read their papers. They also explained to me the ways of becoming more analytical in my assignments...I learnt I should have tackled a specific issue from different perspectives (Transcript No. J10, 43-65).

My problem wasn’t related to language itself but rather to the ability to write critically. It’s related to the ability to read and understand different viewpoints and then to integrate them tactfully in the paper. I became focussed more on the content of the module...I got some help from one of my Polish classmates. She got a Distinction in two assignments. She sent them via email (Transcript No. Z12, 143-148).

The above extracts signify an interplay between the participants’ agency and contextual conditions represented by their peers to achieve their learning goals; namely, increasing their knowledge in their own majors and getting high grades in their modules as well. Mouza, the Emirati participant, mentioned that to improve her skill of critical analysis/thinking, she borrowed a book from the University library entitled ‘How to Improve your Assignment Results’ to help her in this regard.

7.3.2.3 Impacts of the Module Tutors' Practices on the Participants' Strategy Use and Development

The data of this research stage suggest that participants appreciated tutors who put a lot of emphasis on the students' ideas, gave them a clear vision about the module and provided them with useful materials and detailed feedback on their written assignments (Sovic, 2013).

Mouza, for instance, made the following comment:

The tutor of my core module was knowledgeable, encouraging and concerned with creating a cooperative atmosphere inside the classroom. When I was stuck on the assignment of her module, she replied to my questions that I sent via email...she recommended one book to me. She gave me a good mark at the end with detailed written feedback (Transcript No. M12, 39-43).

The above extract indicates that the participants valued any kind of support and guidance given by their tutors to them. In this sense, the alteration to independent learning needed to be supported.

The interview data also show that some participants expressed their dismay at the practices of some tutors. They had three essential criticisms of their tutors: (1) speaking fast while delivering the lectures (Nasser, Mouza and Rama); (2) non-manipulating the composition of the different learning groups in assessing cooperative tasks to strengthen social cohesion inside the classroom (Khaled, Yazn and Zainab), and (3) giving students inadequate support to develop the critical thinking skills to use while writing the assignments (all the participants excluding Fadi). The following extract taken from Rama's transcript exemplifies her criticisms of some tutors:

I sometimes had a problem in understanding the tutors' speech in the UK...I asked one tutor if he could slow down his pace of teaching and that of speaking. But he ignored my request...the paper-based feedback would be more useful if we received it

after one week of submitting the assignment because I sometimes forgot what I discussed in the past assignments (Transcript No. R11, 110-118).

Unlike all the other participants, Fadi was the only one who had a reasonable knowledge of critical thinking in assignments, because his first module (Understanding Research and Critical Appraisal) focused on this idea. Fadi stated that

My tutor told us that the heart of critical thinking was negotiating between the different viewpoints of a specific topic. And after weighing up the arguments, we had to state our considered position...To critically appraise a journal article, we learnt the PICO tool to help to break down the query into Population, Intervention, Comparison and Outcome. This module was also supported by web-based resources (Transcript No. F10, 61-68).

This extract depicts the focal role that MA tutors need to play in developing the critical thinking skills of their international students.

7.3.2.4 Mediating Agents: Others

The data at this stage of the research show that the participants living on the university campus had a more positive outlook towards their flatmates, and they referred to some instances of their interactions with them by, for instance, visiting diverse places in the UK and sharing meals in addition to playing football and billiards together. The participants' changing standpoint towards their flatmates might be attributed to three major reasons: 1) the increased awareness of the participants as regards the lifestyle on campus; 2) the presence of international students from different backgrounds inside the campus although the Chinese still constituted the dominant group, and 3) the need for socialising with each other to avoid isolation. This idea was aptly described by Yazn, who indicated that

I was living with students from different nationalities. They were from China, Greece, India, and Turkey. It's good to listen to different dialects and exchange ideas and experiences together. I was in a very good relationship with the Turkish guy...we sometimes play billiards at weekends (Transcript No. Y11, 22-27).

In effect, seeking out authentic opportunities to practise English in a non-academic setting occupied a secondary position for most participants after the start of their MA programmes. Jamal, meanwhile, declared that his two five and six-year-old children played a role in fostering his listening and speaking skills, and sharpening his vocabulary through sometimes using English in their daily communication along with occasionally watching the Disney programmes with them. The following extract elicits this point:

I didn't feel shy about learning new vocabulary from my small children. I sometimes watched with them children's programmes such as cartoons, Superman and Walt Disney. These programmes helped me improve my listening skills. (Transcript No. J10, 21-23)

In this sense, Jamal felt that it was natural to learn English from any supportive resource, including his small children, although traditional parent-child roles may deter such strategies (Hall and Guéry, 2010).

7.3.3 Academic Studies in the Medium of English

The analysis of the interview data reveals that academic coursework in the medium of English had a strong impact on the participants' strategy use and their motivation orientation towards learning/using English. Apart from Khaled, all the other participants indicated that their vocabulary inventory, especially those pertinent to their area of study expanded because of receiving their academic lectures in English, reading many resources in English to write

their assignments, and socialising with their classmates. For instance, Mouza made the following comment:

My vocabulary repertoire was enlarged, especially medical terminology. This was because of attending lectures delivered by British tutors and discussing some ideas with my colleagues. I always tried to pay attention to their way of pronouncing words...I also learnt new vocabulary from reading many resources in English while writing my assignments (Transcript No. M11, 54-66).

In this sense, the reviewing or rote learning strategies that many of them used to rely on heavily in their homelands were rarely used in the new context, mainly because of the changing mode of assessment. However, Khaled claimed that although he encountered many new words in his academic studies in the UK, he had difficulty in retaining and recalling vocabulary. For him, writing down the new vocabulary on a piece of paper several times along with repeatedly practising it in context would be the best strategy to retain any vocabulary. However, he did not employ this strategy because of the pressure of academic study. Rather, he often used the Babylon dictionary installed on his laptop to look up unfamiliar vocabulary while reading PDF articles in order to save time. To support his point, he declared that

As most of my academic work in the UK has to be done on the computer, I often used the Babylon dictionary to check the vocabulary while reading the articles and e-books necessary for writing my assignments. I highlighted the unfamiliar word and this dictionary gave me its category and meaning. However, I felt this strategy wasn't so useful in retaining the vocabulary words...I decided to use the new vocabulary in my communication here (Transcript No. K12, 133-147).

This extract includes a reference to Khaled's exercise of his agency through the attempts to practise the new words in his daily conversations with others to store and retrieve them.

7.3.3.1 Assessment methods: Academic Writing Requirements

The primary means of assessment in the participants' MA programmes was on academic writing, rather than on end-of-course examination, comprising multiple choice and short essay questions as it used to be in their homelands. In this research, all the participants, to a greater or lesser extent, responded effectively to the changing mode of assessment by embracing a new set of LLSs or reactivating some old ones, in accordance with the assigned learning tasks to attain their goal of successfully accomplishing their MA programmes. For example, the presence of computers in the participants' lives in the UK has become overriding, in the sense that they did most of their academic work on or near a computer. Related to this, they used a variety of learning technology resources to facilitate and organise their academic studies. Examples of these learning technology resources being mediated by their peers were the Mendeley Desktop, Dropbox, SkyDrive and Mindjet.

Since the experience of writing an extended essay (between 3000-5000 words) requiring them to discuss an unfamiliar topic critically was new to all participants, they confronted some challenges in this respect. For instance, Yazn, as regards his first experience of writing academic assignments, used the analogy of 'a non-swimmer in a deep sea'. Along with the difficulty of rendering their works more critical than descriptive, they outlined some of the aspects of academic writing they identified as challenging:

➤ *Finding and Selecting Resources*

To varying degrees, the participants referred to the difficulty of identifying the criteria for choosing the most relevant and reliable learning resources to answer their assignment question (Górska, 2013). Three participants (khaled, Nasser and Mouza) mentioned that they lacked knowledge about a long research-based assignment because the university teachers in their homelands used to ask them to read only from the assigned books, in spite of the

availability of huge libraries and e-resources there (Górska, 2013). Nasser, for instance, expressed this idea by stating that

Writing long academic assignments was a new experience to me. I spent a lot of time searching for references from the Internet or books to choose what I needed for my assignments...in the first assignment, I felt disappointed after spending three days without finding anything useful for my topic...I followed one PhD student's advice to use Google Scholar to find peer-reviewed articles. I did that by using some key words relevant to my assignment question. I also made use of the reading list given by my tutors (Transcript No. N12, 133-147).

In this sense, the participants confronted a challenge in differentiating 'between core and peripheral material' (Smailes and Gannon-Leary, 2008: 55). This matter also held true for the other participants. To overcome this difficulty, they used some strategies such as reading the updated references included in the reading list and using accurately search terms in Google Scholar and library databases.

Three participants (Fadi, Rama and Yazn) reported that they sometimes used to book an appointment with information librarians for specialist help in their subject areas, including finding source material for their assignment questions. Unlike the other participants, Jamal recalled that he did not face a noticeable challenge in searching for useful resources while writing his assignments. He said that 'most of my MA tutors tended to include in the given reading lists the parts or pages which we needed to read' (Transcript No. J10, 68-69).

➤ *Reading and Organising Ideas in English*

After finding the relevant source material, the participants were required to read it. In the findings of the second stage, the majority of the participants talked about the reading strategies mediated by their tutors such as skimming for the general idea, scanning for specific information, summarising and paraphrasing. The data from this stage of the research

suggest that the participants employed these strategies to varying degrees in writing their academic assignments. For example, two participants (Fadi and Zainab) were likely to encounter the least difficulties when dealing with English texts, because their entire academic studies in their homelands were in English. They also deployed a set of cognitive and metacognitive strategies to highlight and organise the necessary ideas for their work. In echoing this idea, Zainab declared that

When writing any assignment, I first checked the key words of the assignment question. Then I read the module handouts by focusing on the parts relevant to my assignment, to take notes afterwards. I borrowed some books from the library and downloaded some articles as well...I drew mind maps using Mindjet software programme to help me organise the main themes faster...when I read articles, I often skipped some sections, and for a book I read just one part. I learnt these strategies from my university teachers in Iraq and they were also emphasised by tutors in the pre-sessional course (Transcript No. Z9, 22-48).

All the other participants reported experiencing difficulty in spending long hours extracting ideas from the selected resources, particularly in the first term of their postgraduate programmes. This difficulty was mainly because of the inclination of many participants to use a meditative way of reading, believing that they, in Jamal's words, had to 'read every page of an article or a chapter of a book several times to assure myself that everything was understood and could be recalled' (Transcript No. J10, 88-90). By doing this, they limited their opportunities to practise English in out-of-class settings. For four participants (Khaled, Nasser, Mouza and Yazn), the assessment type that they used to undergo in their homelands may have had a role to play in this regard. That is, the preparation for multiple-choice tests required a careful reading speed, and 'the ability to differentiate between apparently similar lexical items' (Dolan and Macias, 2009: 27). Nonetheless, these participants changed their

reading strategies in the second term of their MA programmes, as epitomised in the interview extracts taken from Yazn and Khaled:

In the first three assignments, I read every single word in a paper as I used to do when I was in Jordan...it's a time-consuming process...I consulted my European colleagues for the other assignments. To gather ideas, I began reading the abstract and conclusion of each paper to see if it's related to my assignment...I also learnt from one tutor the importance of drawing a mind map to generate and organise my ideas (Transcript No. Y11, 88-102)

I used to read the whole paper without taking notes on the materials I read. Therefore, I sometimes read the same article more than thrice to find the idea that I was searching for...after installing Mendeley programme into my desktop, I started taking notes on the same PDF rather than on papers (Transcript No. K12, 125-131).

The above extracts accord with Bailey's (2013: 177) argument that a 'meditative way of reading does not always work well in the UK when students are required to survey a range of material and pick out key points in a short time'. Notably, all participants succeeded in their assignments from the first time of submission.

7.3.3.2 Team Work

As previously described, the way the participants oriented to cooperative language learning tasks on the pre-sessional course was less serious. This finding was apparently attributed to the dominance of Asian students in this course. Additionally, the mark was unimportant to most participants, since they had already attained an unconditional offer to attend their MA programmes. However, the participants' perceptions towards the value of collaborative group work in the UK changed after the start of their MA programmes.

The data suggest that the participants' group work experiences were profoundly influenced by the way that modules taught in the first two terms of their MA programmes were assessed. More precisely, the cooperative learning tasks given by MA tutors to four participants (Fadi, Jamal, Mouza and Rama) inside the classroom were not formally assessed in the final score of their MA modules. Rather, these tasks were intended to promote learning and independence among students. Apart from Rama, the other three participants reflected on their satisfying group work experiences, as exemplified in the following extracts:

The majority of the students in my course were British and Indians. This motivated me to exchange my ideas with them in the cooperative activities...at the beginning it's not easy to catch up with them in the group work (Transcript No. M10, 167-173).

We don't have to sit in the classroom for three hours. I got many new ideas from my peers while working in groups such as the application of the communicative approach in Libya and in their countries (Transcript No. J10, 177-1179).

The above extracts indicate that the participants not only referred to the linguistic benefits of engaging in group work as was the case on the pre-sessional course, because the collaborative learning tasks also helped them increase their breadth of knowledge in their subject specialisation. Both social and metacognitive learning strategies were noticeably deployed by these participants, such as seeking practice opportunities and identifying the purpose of a learning task. Rama divulged that she had a rather negative outlook towards group work, mainly because of her inadequate level of English proficiency. Rama stated that

Tutors sometimes gave us long texts to discuss together. Some of my classmates were British and European...they discussed the given text quickly before I finished it. Therefore I often kept silent during the discussion but I revised the materials later. I'm slow in reading and comprehending English texts because all my study in Syria was in Arabic (Transcript No. R10, 120-133).

This extract depicts the fact that the particular linguistic obstacles that Rama faced in group work were partially due to her negative past experiences of English in Syria.

The interview data also reveal that the other four participants (Khaled, Nasser, Yazn and Zainab) held more sophisticated views towards the value of team work because it accounted for 20-30% of the assessment in most of their taught modules. For instance, Zainab mentioned that her aspirations of contributing meaningfully in group work discussion and leading her team to outperform other teams were not accomplished in all group assignments, because of three reasons: 1) the inclination of British and European classmates for working with students like themselves, believing that the other students would drag down their marks, 2) lack of cooperation between her group members (e.g., the Chinese members were often shy to express their viewpoints), and 3) tutors' practices through allowing students to self-select the composition of the groups. The following extract captures this point:

Some of the group members weren't working hard. So it's unfair that all the students in the same group got the same grade...the British and Europeans always worked together because they could easily communicate with each other and achieve the highest marks. I didn't ask to join their group in order not to feel embarrassed...whenever there were two Chinese they just spoke in Chinese and that made me nervous. So I had to keep asking them what they're saying... others just sat back and agreed with what others decided...the tutor should have applied specific criteria when dividing the groups (Transcript No. Z11, 21-44).

In this sense, the social networks surrounding an individual might hamper their entry to their desired community (Norton and Toohey, 2001). As already mentioned, both Khalid and Yazn attended an MA programme in Engineering Business Management, whereas Nasser's MA course was in Manufacturing Systems Engineering. There were three modules taught in both programmes. These three participants mentioned that they were content with their group work experiences in one module because the groups were formed based on a questionnaire

they completed called ‘The Belbin Team Role Inventory’. This is a personality test to measure preferences for eight team roles such as shaper, coordinator, implementer and completer-finisher. They reported that this inventory enabled them to see themselves as partners with meaningful contributions to make to the group, along with more opportunities to use English. The following extract elucidates this issue:

In most modules, groups were formed by seating proximity. But the composition of the groups in one module was based on completing a personality questionnaire to find out what team roles would suit us. Some of us were good in leadership whereas others were good in critical thinking...my team role was a coordinator. That’s true because I liked to talk only when I felt there’s something I could add...I knew my strengths and my team ended up with a very good score (Transcript No. N12, 205-222).

Accordingly, many participants replicated an increased level of awareness towards team work, by asserting that such collaborative tasks had a key role in developing their oral English proficiencies and widening their knowledge about their own specialisation.

7.3.4 Summary of the Findings of the Third Stage

The third stage of data analysis has provided a deeper understanding of the complexity and dynamism of the participants’ LLS use, along with their intentionality in exercising agency to manage a new demand; namely, coursework assessment in English. For example, the majority of the participants, especially Khaled, Yazn and Zainab, expressed their growing awareness concerning the potential of incorporating a host of technologies (electronic dictionaries installed on their laptops, Dropbox, Mendeley Desktop, Mindjet and SkyDrive) in their educational lives, mainly to save time and organise their academic work. Khaled, for example, used the Mendeley Desktop in his study to manage and store the references of his

written assignments in addition to annotating PDFs. The third research stage also disclosed how English medium academic studies influenced their strategic language learning efforts, including their learning motivations and beliefs. To exemplify this further, many participants divulged that academic study pressure was extremely high, and accordingly that they faced a difficulty in creating a balance between completing their academic requirements and allocating a specific time to improve their English in the forms of watching English films or seeking opportunities to befriend British people, for instance. Two participants (Nasser and Rama), for example, stated that they sometimes missed sleep and gave up socialising with individuals in non-academic settings in the UK to finish their postgraduate assignments. Thus, English for most of the participants was significant principally for instrumental reasons, such as helping them to survive their academic studies in the medium of English, along with increasing their knowledge about their own fields.

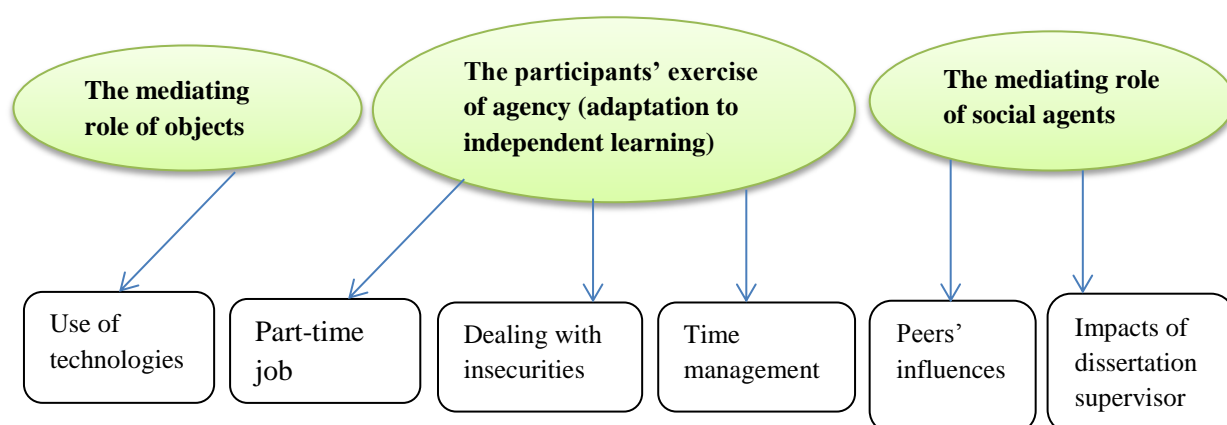
7.4 Findings of the Fourth/Exit Stage: Writing a Dissertation in English (15 May-28 November 2013)

7.4.1 Overview

The findings of the first three research stages have successfully addressed the essential objectives of this longitudinal qualitative research in relation to capturing the developmental processes in the LLSs of a group of university Arab learners studying in a British University, taking into account their past English learning experiences. Nonetheless, two crucial reasons encouraged me to further follow up empirically the examination of the participants' language learning experiences and strategy use while writing a dissertation in English (about 15,000-20,000 words) as part of their master's studies. Firstly, the participants expressed on different

occasions during the third research stage their worries about the difficulties that they had expected to face while writing a dissertation in English. Accordingly, understanding the participants' experiences in writing a dissertation would provide a more holistic portrait concerning their shifting LLSs and underlying motivations. Secondly, to the best of my knowledge, there is no empirical study that has addressed the challenges faced by Arab university learners and the strategies used by them while writing their dissertations in English. In this respect, the longitudinal follow-up research in the fourth stage was implemented in order to fill this gap. Three main themes emerged from the analysis of the interview data during this stage: 'the mediating role of social agents', 'the mediating role of objects' and 'the participants' adaptation to independent learning' (see figure 12).

Figure 12: Thematic map of the fourth stage of data analysis



At this research stage, the participants' learning motivations contain both self-determined and context-mediated elements (Gao, 2008b). That is, the main goal for all participants as regards their stay in the UK was to complete their master's degrees successfully as an indispensable step in order to succeed in their future careers and meet their family expectations. Notwithstanding this, the participants at this stage displayed on some occasions their self-determined motives for improving their English and academic knowledge in their own

specialisations, especially inasmuch as their research topics were essentially based on their own personal interests. This point will be discussed in the forthcoming sections.

7.4.2 Impacts of the Social Agents on the Participants' Academic Learning Process

This section examines the mediating role of a number of individuals on the participants' academic learning and strategy use in the third term of their postgraduate programmes. Here, the dissertation supervisor occupied a prominent role for all participants as will be discussed in the forthcoming sections.

7.4.2.1 Mediating Agents: Dissertation Supervisor

The data suggest that the participants raised some issues related to supervision, since the amount of support provided by their dissertation supervisors varied. The participants, to varying degrees, were satisfied with the process of choosing their research topic, which was based on their very personal interest and the guidance of their supervisors during the process of narrowing down the focus of their research. The following interview extracts elucidated this idea:

The sector of healthcare in Iraq was in need of effective project management because it influenced individuals' lives and the economy of a country...following my supervisor's advice, I decided to focus on the role of stakeholders in managing the healthcare projects (Transcript No. Z13, 33-37).

I got much information about communicative language teaching in my MA programme here. I felt I had a chance to investigate this issue in depth in my

dissertation. My supervisor advised me to focus on state schools in Libya (Transcript No. J12, 46-48).

In my dissertation, I wanted to focus on how we could help employees be more engaged in their work. This research could avail my country...my supervisor advised me to focus on the minority groups in work (Transcript No. K13, 27-32).

The above extracts replicate the mediating role of supervisors in fostering participants' agency while finding an appropriate research topic.

The data analysis also show that the participants held different expectations and perceptions of the supervision process. Two participants (Jamal and Rama) were fully content with the amount and type of input provided by their supervisors. They mentioned that their supervisors offered them a considerable amount of support by providing them with some resources relevant to their research topic, suggesting the appropriate methods for their study and the way of approaching potential participants along with giving detailed feedback on their drafts (Paltridge and Woodrow, 2012). Although research degrees typically demand independent work (Starfield, 2010), the guidance given by these supervisors might be partially attributed to their sympathy with the participants' worries over their families back home due to the political turmoil taking place in their homelands. The following extracts explain this idea:

My supervisor was compassionate towards my worries about my family in Syria...he sent me articles and links related to my study. I used the questionnaire developed by my supervisor in one of his writings...my aim now is to get my master's degree at any cost (Transcript No. R14, 59-67).

My supervisor was always protecting me from the pressure I experienced...he supplied me with an extensive reading list for my research. His comments were so detailed on my drafts and he responded quickly to my emails with questions (Transcript No. J13, 43-51).

The above extracts indicate that Jamal and Rama received a considerable amount of assistance from their supervisors. However, the other five participants held more complicated views towards the issue of supervision. There was a discrepancy between these participants' expectations and the supervisor's perceptions of what the role of a supervisor involves, principally with respect to the amount of input that would be provided by the supervisor (Paltridge and Woodrow, 2012). The following extracts epitomise this idea:

My supervisor was more reactive than proactive. He sometimes didn't reply to my emails...I was shocked when he said that his main task was only to give general advice...However, he used to give me detailed feedback on my drafts...I learnt to depend more on myself (Transcript No. Z15, 66-75).

I didn't receive many useful comments on my drafts from my supervisor. He used just to mention in the body of his emails a few things for me to consider. I found reading materials by myself. However, he's friendly and kept encouraging me throughout my research (Transcript No. N14, 118-122).

My supervisor used to respond to my emails quickly and commented on my drafts. But she often gave me the choice to do whatever I wanted. So I sometimes felt afraid of being not on the right track (Transcript No. K13, 102-104).

In this sense, the majority of participants wanted their supervisors to direct their dissertations more. The above extracts also reveal the growing metacognitive awareness of the participants by reflecting on the pros and cons of their supervisors.

7.4.2.2 Peer Mediation

In the third stage of the research, classmates from a diverse range of nationalities were available, and they had a conspicuous impact on the participants, for instance, by

internalising their academic studies principally in terms of the mediation of learning resources. The data collected at this stage of the research suggest that the participants were inclined to discuss their research issues and share their academic and non-academic problems almost only with their Arab counterparts. The scarcity of classroom lectures in the third term of the participants' postgraduate programmes appeared to play a role in curtailing their communication with non-Arab students. The following extracts exemplify this idea:

Such days I'm studying in the library with two Arab colleagues. We encourage each other and exchange some good tips mentioned by our supervisors. For example, I followed the advice of looking for articles that presented a systematic review of the previous studies related to my research topic (Transcript No. N15, 22-26).

Excluding my supervisor, the most influential individual for me was Fadi [the participant in this study]. I met him on the pre-session course...He kept asking me about my academic progress and other things...I also shared some good articles with one Saudi colleague via Dropbox (Transcript No. Y14, 33-42).

In the case of Rama, she built a strong relationship with a Korean classmate who helped her to use the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to analyse her quantitative data.

7.4.3 The Participants' Adaptation to Independent Learning

7.4.3.1 Time Management

The data suggest that the participants demonstrated effective time-management skills by showing their awareness of deadlines, starting working on their dissertation early, setting priorities and allowing sufficient time to revise their work. They mentioned that the difficulties that they underwent while writing their assignments in the first two terms of their

postgraduate programmes helped them to improve their metacognitive strategies including planning and time management. This idea is elucidated in the extracts below:

From the beginning of my master's programme onward, I worked hard to finish my academic assignments at least three days before the deadline. I did that because I had to send my work to a tutor in the surgery sessions to check it before the submission. So I'm familiar with this matter (Transcript No. M13, 118-122).

As my supervisor didn't provide his group students with a timetable to follow, I made use of the one provided by my colleague's supervisor. So each week I sent an email to my supervisor telling him of the part that I expected to finish (Transcript No. Z15, 88-91).

I'm a well-organised person by nature. I started working on my dissertation early...my work as a residential tutor on the campus for a month didn't impede my study. As I used only the questionnaire method, I completed my dissertation two weeks before the submission (Transcript No. Y15, 77-82).

The above extracts depict the participants' exercise of their agentic power as a precondition to control their own learning processes and organise their research.

7.4.3.2 Dealing with Insecurities

The data also indicate that the participants commented on their new identity as a researcher and as an academic while writing their dissertations. In spite of their acknowledgement of not being competent researchers, the participants to varying degrees exhibited their agentic behaviour and willingness to act as researchers in order not only to complete their master's degrees, but also to achieve their desire to add some contributions in their own research areas and to benefit their own countries. They did this by confronting different challenges

agentively, principally the challenges of accessing and collecting data. The following extracts describe this idea:

Writing a dissertation was a very independent project...I had a problem in finding participants to complete my online survey...I asked a lady working in a graduate office of my department to send it to undergraduate students...I drew a mindmap for each chapter that summed up the main points. Each concept was reduced to few words. This enabled me to review my ideas quickly (Transcript No. Y14, 66-75).

I felt I grew not only as a student but far more importantly as a researcher. I think this was one of the aims of my postgraduate programme here...one of the challenges I faced was how to present my findings. So I checked some examples of dissertations from previous students...this project could benefit my country. (Transcript No. K13, 107-113).

These extracts affirm that the participants held a personal sense of agency, which arose from a belief that ‘their behaviour can make a difference to their learning in that setting’ (Mercer, 2012: 41).

7.4.4 Technology-mediated Learning Resources

In the third research stage, the participants, particularly Khaled, Zainab and Yazn, used many technologies as supportive learning resources to complete their postgraduate coursework assignments. These technologies (e.g., electronic dictionaries installed on their laptops, Dropbox, Mendeley Desktop, Mindjet and SkyDrive) were basically mediated by their peers. The experiential data collected from this research stage suggest that technology had played an increasingly focal role in the academic life of participants, considering that they could not have completed their research work for the dissertation without the affordances provided by technologies. More precisely, they used Google’s Scholarly search engine and library

catalogues to find relevant resources (all participants), Mendeley Desktop to manage the references and annotate PDFs (Khaled, Nasser and Yazn), Dropbox to save their work and/or share some documents with their close colleagues working on similar research topics (Mouza, Yazn and Zainab), smart phones to audio-record the speech of their dissertation supervisors and/or their interviewees (Nasser, Rama and Zainab), some of the software packages to analyse the quantitative data such as SNAP and SPSS (Khaled, Jamal, Rama, and Yazn), and the Microsoft Word spell-checking facility (all participants). The following extracts epitomise this point further:

Computer and Internet technologies greatly facilitated my efforts to produce my dissertation... I downloaded the relevant articles on my laptop and used Mendeley to arrange them and take notes on the same PDF...I used my iPhone4S to record the interviews...I supported the soft copy reading because paper is bad for the environment (Transcript No. N15, 154-177).

I've been obsessed with technology since I was in Jordan. In my dissertation, I relied heavily on technologies...I recorded my supervisor's speech in my meetings with him. To analyse my quantitative data, I used a statistical analysis software programme called SNAP. I learnt how to use it from the links provided by the university and by watching some videos on YouTube (Transcript No. Y15, 136-149).

The above extracts reveal the importance of technologies in bolstering the educational and linguistic aspects of their lives in the UK.

7.4.5 Summary of the Findings of the Fourth Stage

In comparison with the findings gained in the previous research stages, the participants' agentive powers appeared more clearly during the fourth stage, through acting as a researcher and student simultaneously. They employed many strategies internalised by themselves rather

than by other social agents- strategies such as allocating a timetable for completing each part of a dissertation along with using a host of technology tools such as Google's Scholarly search engine, Mendeley Desktop and Dropbox. The participants also showed a development in their learning goals and motivations while working on their dissertations. For example, many participants (Jamal, Khaled, Nasser Yazn, Zai nab) believed that their research topic could benefit their homelands and fill some research gaps in their own specialisations.

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the linguistic, academic and sociocultural difficulties that the participants faced during their entire stay in the UK. It has also explored their changing strategic language learning efforts, including their learning motivations and identity development in the UK. It has revealed that the participants' strategy use continued shifting towards being less exam-oriented. While the data indicate that their strategy use exposed the participants to more language input, they reveal mixed findings on the use of social strategies and different experiences of interacting with different social networks in the UK. The findings of this chapter and the previous one will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 8 DISCUSSION

8.1 Introduction

This longitudinal qualitative study is underpinned by sociocultural perspectives on language learning. As such, it has aimed to capture an in-depth, dynamic understanding of the development of the language learning strategies (LLSs) of eight postgraduate Arab students over a time span of seventeenth months in the UK, beginning from their previous English learning experiences. A phenomenographic approach was used for this enquiry, and an exploratory instrumental multiple case study was adopted to disclose the full range of ways in which these participants experienced the phenomenon of interest from their own standpoints. For data analysis, systematic thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006; 2013) was applied to organise the qualitative data into meaningful units, i.e., themes. In the two previous chapters, detailed analyses and interpretations of the findings of the study have been presented. Chapter 6 reported on the participants' language learning motivations and the particular patterns of LLSs that they had deployed in their homelands. The findings gained from this research stage served as a baseline for comparison with the findings from the other three stages, which were presented in Chapter 7 with a view to delineating these participants' shifting strategic language learning efforts in the UK across time. The socially constructed, dynamic nature of the participants' strategy use was seen in this study as resulting from the close-knit intersection between agency and a multitude of situated contextual realities, including social and material resources (e.g., parents, teachers and technologies) along with 'discursive learning' (i.e. motives and beliefs).

The present chapter is divided into three main sections. The first explains the theoretical framework used by the researcher to capture the intricate association between language learners' learning goals, learning motivations and strategy use. This framework is essential to provide some tentative answers to the research questions of the study in the second section. These research questions, originally outlined in Section 2.8 of Chapter 2, were as follows:

RQ1 What are the particular patterns of LLSs often utilised by a group of University learners from an Arabic background in their homelands?

RQ2 What influences the participants' particular patterns of LLSs in their homelands?

RQ3 What are the changes in the participants' strategy use after arrival in the UK?

RQ4 What influences the participants' changes in their strategy use after arrival in the UK?

In the third section I will critically reflect on some major issues emerging from relating the principal findings of the study to the research questions. These issues are as follows:

- The impacts of 'shadow education' (i.e. private supplementary tutoring) on the participants' choice and use of their language learning strategies;
- Application of technologies as mediating material artefacts and
- A dynamic assessment of language learning.

8.2 Framework for Understanding the Intersection between Language Learners' Goals, Motivations and Learning Strategies from a Socio-dynamic Perspective

One of the identifying features of a learning strategy listed by Macaro (2006: 328) is 'the explicitness of its goal orientation' i.e., having a reason or a cluster of reasons for learning the

language (for a complete list of LLS features, see Chapter 2, Section 2.2.2). As shown in Table 14 presented in Chapter 6, the participants' strategy use was classified in accordance with their oriented-learning goals into two main categories: 'compulsory strategies' (i.e., largely regulated by educational values and cultural beliefs) and 'voluntary strategies' (i.e., basically internalised within the self to master English). The strategy classification used in the current research study was essentially inspired by Chamot's (2004: 17) claim that 'little attention has been paid to students' learning goals' while classifying learning strategies (for more elaboration of the controversial issue in categorising strategies, see Section 2.2.3.1 in Chapter 2).

The analysis in the preceding chapters is aligned with the conceptualisation of Leontiev's (1981) version of activity theory to the nature of LLSs by considering them as 'far from stable and unitary' (Ushioda, 2013b: 3), since they did not operate alone and were 'motivated by specific objectives and...instrumental to fulfilling specific goals' (Donato and McCormick, 1994: 455). Theorised as such, strategic learning engagement 'is always directional, taking individuals forwards towards a specific goal' (Dörnyei et al., 2014: 13). In this sense, providing comprehensive answers to the research questions of the study entailed capturing the intricately interwoven connections of the participants' shifting learning goals, various English learning strategies and their underlying motivations across a gamut of academic and non-academic settings over time, and in response to events.

With this in mind, I proposed a conceptual framework to discern the distinctive features of participants situated strategy use before and after their arrival in the UK, with reference to the L2 motivational self-system and the two associated constructs of ideal L2 self and ought-to L2 self (Dörnyei, 2009b; 2014), the promotion and prevention aspects of instrumentality (Higgins, 2000), the concept of 'required motivation' (Malcolm, 2013; Warden and Lin,

2000) and my own distinction between immature, short-term and long-term learning goals and that of compulsory and voluntary strategies attained from the findings of the current study. The following Table exemplifies the suggested framework:

Table 15: Illustration of intersection between language learners' goals, motivations and learning strategies from a socio-dynamic perspective

Items	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Learning goals	Immature goals (i.e., partially recognised the importance of English in one's life- English as an academic subject)	Short-term (proximal) goals (i.e. having a clear purpose in mind to learn English for immediate, material gains)	Long-term (distal) goals (i.e. having a clear plan to master English for academic/ professional advancement
Learning motivation	Required motivation (i.e., passing an English course/test with a minimal amount of effort without striving to build a certain level of proficiency needed for a practical purpose.)	An 'instrumental-prevention' focus, related to the ' <i>ought-to self</i> ' (i.e., trying to meet the expectations of others, and to avoid possible negative outcomes. It is less internalised within one's self)	Integrativeness and/or an 'instrumental-promotion' focus, related to the 'the ideal L2 self (i.e., more internalised within one's self). One can have also a higher degree of 'international posture' i.e., using English to connect to the international community
Language learning strategies	Compulsory/other-imposed strategies	The dominant use of Compulsory/other-imposed strategies with a few voluntary strategies	A balance between the use of voluntary and compulsory/other-imposed strategies

Drawing on the socio-dynamic perspectives of linking the human self with human action, i.e. 'the doing side of personality' (Dörnyei and Kubanyiova, 2014: 11), Zoltan Dörnyei (2009b) has developed a motivational model for better understanding language learners' future goals, aspirations and even fears. This model is conceived within an 'L2 motivational self system', using Markus' and Nurius' (1986: 954) notion of possible selves to depict individuals' ideas

of what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming' in the future. Dörnyei's (2009) L2 motivational self system basically differentiates between two kinds of possible selves: the ideal and ought-to selves. The ideal L2 self, as described by Dörnyei (2009b: 17-18), signifies the future self-image that a person internally desires to achieve (i.e., representation of hopes, aspirations or wishes). It corresponds to integrativeness and internalised instrumental motives (e.g. to learn English for the sake of knowing more about English-speaking countries or for achieving professional advancement (ibid). By contrast, the ought-to self is a vision of the future self that appears to embody the wishes and expectations of significant others (e.g., teachers, parents), 'bow to social pressures and demands, or avoid possible negative consequences' (Ushioda, 2014: 133-134). This corresponds to less internalised, more extrinsic instrumental motives (e.g. to study in order not to fail an exam or not to thwart one's parents) (ibid).

Higgins (2000: 209-210) in turn points out that the promotion aspect of instrumentality is associated with the ideal self-image because its focus regulates aspiration towards a desired end-state; whereas, the prevention aspect of instrumentality pertains to the ought-to L2 self because it centres on obligations, responsibilities and safety (i.e. avoidance of a feared end-state). In this sense, the motives related to the ought-to self are more likely to be 'short-term' than those relevant to the ideal self (Gu, 2009: 44). It should be noted that the future self-image needs to be 'accompanied by relevant and effective *procedural strategies* that act as a *roadmap* towards the goal', similar to an elite athlete's training plan (Dörnyei and Kubanyiova, 2014: 11, authors' emphasis). In other words, taking up a particular set of LLSs that address one's future vision is seen as a prerequisite to accomplishing that vision; otherwise, it turns to hold 'the character more of fantasy rather than concrete ambition' (Lamb, 2013a: 24). The suggested framework will be further clarified while answering the research questions in the next section.

8.3 Answering Research Questions

8.3.1 *RQ1 What are the particular patterns of LLSs often utilised by a group of University learners from an Arabic background in their homelands?*

As demonstrated in Chapter 6, the participants' language learning goals in their homelands changed over time, and these goals played a profound role in shaping and modifying the participants' strategy use and learning motivations. During the school level of education, the participants, in particular those who attended state-funded public schools, reported using strategies associated with learning English as a compulsory subject, mostly for classroom study and examinations (Gao et al., 2013; Jiang and Smith, 2009). For this reason, the majority of strategies listed in Table 14 went under the category of 'compulsory strategy use' and were basically mediated by their English teachers in formal settings- strategies such as 'using Arabic excessively in English classes', 'asking teachers for an L1 translation', 'reading the grammatical rules several times before working on the textbook exercises' and 'writing the new words several times for the exam'. To exemplify this point, many of these participants were mostly concerned with remembering the words for the test, rather than as a long-term goal. This is further demonstrated by the general failure to revise items learned after the formal test (see extracts M3, 88-107, N3, 55-57 and J3, 145-151 in Section 6.4.1.3 of Chapter 6).

It may be argued that most participants before going to university did not noticeably recognise the potential importance of English in their lives, mainly because their future self-image as English speakers or users was not nurtured at school or home (Magid and Chen, 2012; Ueki and Takeuchi, 2014). They saw English as 'just another subject on the school curriculum, quite divorced from the powerful resonances which it might have in the communities where it is used' (Lamb and Budiyanto, 2013: 19). As a result, their motivation

for learning English was likely to be categorised as ‘required motivation’, on the grounds that ‘passing an English course is detached from any real life purpose, but is a compulsory part of the education syllabus’ (Malcolm, 2013: 100). This finding apparently reflects that of Lamb (2012; 2013a), who found that none of his Indonesian junior high school participants gave the impression that English was of much benefit in accomplishing their future dreams. Lamb (2012; 2013a), along with other researchers (e.g., Harter, 2005; Pizzolato, 2006; Zentner and Renaud, 2007) have supported the idea that pre-university students are often incapable of identifying realistic language learning goals, given that ‘early adolescence is typically considered a period of flux and uncertainty’ (Lamb and Budiyanto, 2013: 19, 20). Dörnyei aligns himself with this argument, stating that ‘the self-concept of younger learners may not be sufficiently robust to channel motivation’ (Ryan and Dörnyei, 2013: 95).

Block (2007: 144) in turn has expressed deep scepticism about how far young learners engaging in the process of foreign language learning are able to develop their L2 identities: ‘there is usually far too much first language-mediated baggage and interference for profound changes to occur in the individual’s conceptual system and his/her sense of self’. However, the findings of the present research study suggested a more complicated picture, by emphasising the mediational processes of particular learning communities, including artefacts, practices, interactions and relationships among people (Benson and Cooker, 2013a; Palfreyman, 2006, 2014) (for more details, see Section 8.3.2). For example, two participants (Fadi and Zainab) who were sent by their parents to tuition-charging private schools showed in some instances their awareness of English itself before going to university. This matter was made manifest by using a number of voluntary strategies, which were less internalised by other social agents- strategies such as reading poetry, learning more about geographical places in the UK and participating in English-related competitions (see extracts Z2, 111-138 in Section 6.4.1.3 and F2, 81-89 in Section 6.4.1.2 of Chapter 6). This idea will be further

explained when discussing the effects of ‘shadow education’ on the participants’ strategy use and identity development.

In spite of the questionable results obtained from the previous quantitative LLS published studies on strategy use among Arabic-speaking students learning English (see Section 2.2.3.2 of Chapter 2), there was a degree of consensus in relation to social strategies (i.e. interpersonal behaviours aimed at increasing the amount of L2 communication). These studies (e.g. Abu-Radwan, 2011; Ababneh, 2013; El-Dib, 2004; Khalil, 2005; Salem, 2006) showed that social strategies were the least frequently used strategies, especially among female Arab participants. Abu-Radwan (2011: 145) and El-Dib (2004: 88), for instance, ascribed this finding to the scarcity of real-life opportunities to use English outside the classroom in the Arab world, along with the social structure of most Arab communities which is relatively conservative and patriarchal. Nonetheless, the findings of this qualitative research study displayed more sophisticated and more diverse uses of social strategies.

Apart from Fadi and Zainab, the other participants barely used social strategies at the school level of their education, mostly because of their immature degree of awareness of the significance of English in their lives, resultant from the overuse of Arabic inside the classroom and the insufficient support received from their family members at that stage (Malcolm, 2011, 2013; Taylor, 2013a). Therefore, their use of English was confined merely to uttering a few words inside the classroom. This finding aligns with Malcolm’s (2011: 199) argument that English use by students in the Arab world may be hampered by ‘inadequate resources and little formal support for their language learning’. However, these participants deployed more social strategies after going to the university, given that the content of many taught subjects was delivered in English. Examples of these social strategies were sometimes asking their university tutors and classmates questions in English (all participants excluding

Rama), practising English with pilgrims (Khaled and Nasser) and visiting some native-speaking students living in a dormitory (Yazn) (see Table 14).

It may be noted that in addition to memorisation strategies, the participants at university used more social strategies, as well as other new strategies (e.g. watching English programmes with Arabic subtitles in their spare time, memorising the lyrics of English songs and following a meditative way of reading English texts). They took up these strategies to develop their English ability as a precondition to passing their university modules and satisfying their families' expectations (see extracts N4, 14-18; M4, 14-18 and J2, 22-32 in Section 6.4.2.2 of Chapter 6) (Malcolm, 2011; Van-de-Hoven, 2014). In this sense, an instrumental-prevention force, related to the 'ought-to self' seemed to dominate the motivational orientations of most participants after their entry into the university (Ryan and Irie, 2014: 114). In effect, this finding was echoed in Malcolm's (2011) study, which depicted the difficulties that four Year-One university students from Saudi Arabia underwent while studying some university subjects in English although their previous schooling had exclusively been in Arabic. Malcolm (2011: 201) argued that in this 'sink or swim atmosphere', her participants were seriously afraid of failure and of being shamed in front of their family members. For example, one of Malcolm's (2011: 203) participants put it like this: 'I didn't give up because I think my family is looking at me...I didn't tell anybody the problem was English. Just I told myself it's English and I have to work hard'.

In L2 motivation research, integrativeness was initially suggested by Gardner (1985) to signify language learners' interests in an L2 culture and their willingness to interact with native speakers of the target language, or even identify with them (Yashima, 2013: 39). Tomoko Yashima (2002) proposed the concept of 'international posture' as an alternative to that of integrativeness, for two reasons: (1) the limited opportunities for direct

communications with native speakers of English in foreign language contexts and (2) the impacts of globalisation and of internet use which made English the language of communication among people from different parts of the world (Yashima, 2013: 39-40). Yashima (2002: 57) describes 'international posture' as an 'interest in foreign or international affairs, a willingness to go overseas to stay or work, readiness to interact with intercultural partners, and, one hopes, openness or a non-ethnocentric attitude toward different cultures'.

In the present study, the participants' motivation to go abroad to complete their studies after graduation might be viewed as an example of 'international posturing'. After graduation and before going to the UK, all participants recognised that English would be a tool to help them achieve their ideal selves by using it in their future career. For example, Khaled, Nasser and Yazn mentioned that they decided to enrol in an MA programme in the UK in their areas of specialisation to enable them to accomplish their future aspirations of working in branches of international companies in their homelands. For this reason, the participants employed many LLSs during their preparation for the TOEFL or IELTS exam and for approximately two months before their coming to the UK. These LLSs were more internalised within their selves and less passed on by others (i.e. voluntary strategies). Examples of these strategies were reading English articles online (all participants), enrolling in private supplementary tutoring (all participants excluding Rama and Shapol), assigning specific time to watch English programmes (Nasser and Rama), entering into Yahoo's chat rooms regularly to chat with English people (Khaled) and approaching native speakers of English to practise their English or to help them prepare for the TOEFL or IELTS exam (Khaled, Jamal, Mouza, Nasser and Rama).

8.3.2 RQ2 *What influenced the participants' particular patterns of LLSs in their homelands?*

In addition to the purposeful/goal-oriented dimension of the participants' strategy use discussed in the previous research question, the strategic language learning efforts of these participants did not take place in a sociocultural vacuum, since they were presumably influenced by 'mediated and situated processes' (Huang and Andrews, 2010: 30), through participation in a range of institutional contexts such as schooling and also non-academic ones, including 'the household, the peer group, the workplace or neighbourhood shops' (Palfreyman, 2011: 33). In other words, the participants were active social agents, acting on the world with the assistance of a variety of mediating resources, including social agents (e.g., teachers, family members, friends) and material and cultural tools (e.g., textbooks, assessment modes or technology) alongside some other macro factors; namely, religious and political factors (Gao, 2010a; Gu, 2013; Palfreyman, 2006, 2014). Thus, the multiple processes of social interaction and participation were essential in constructing these participants' strategy use and motivations.

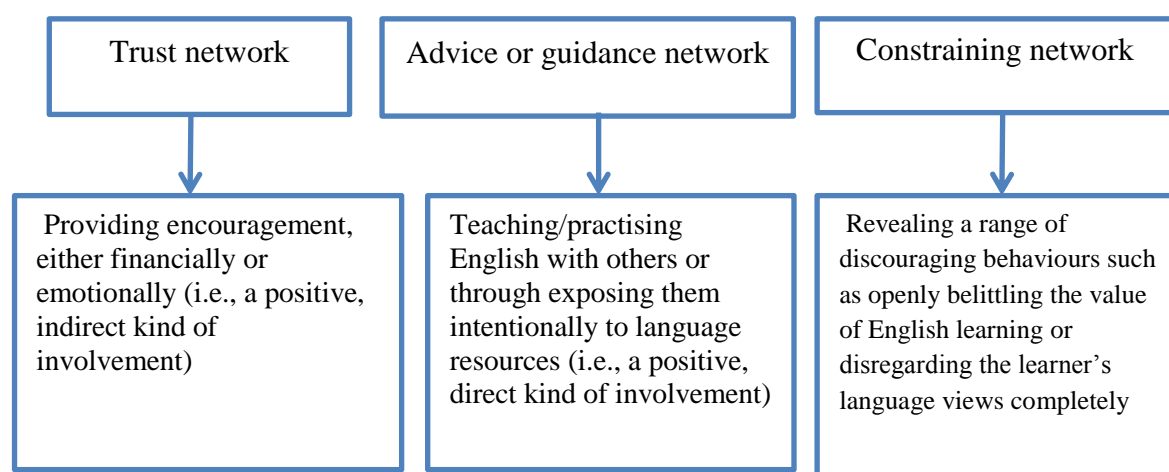
The current research study affirms Benson's (2011a: 7) argument that both 'classroom and out-of-class learning are equally important' in shaping participants' strategy use and development. The following discussion will elucidate how the contextual resources organised and regulated the participants' English language learning in conjunction with bolstering and sometimes deterring them from embracing a specific set of LLSs in accordance with the situated learning settings or 'nexus of practice' in Murray's (2014: 246) words.

8.3.2.1 Effects of the Participants' Social Networks on their Strategy Use and Future Self-image

Given that a plethora of LLS research has been underpinned by cognitive theories in addition to the belief that the responsibility for learners' language learning relies heavily on language teachers' shoulders (see Chapter 2), the role of informal social agents or 'important others' (Kyriacou and Zhu, 2008: 97) (e.g., parents, friends and co-workers) in influencing other individuals' language learning has been insufficiently explored (Gao, 2006b; 2012; Watson-Gegeo, 2004). Since it is guided by sociocultural perspectives, however, this study found that English teachers and immediate family members, mainly parents, signified the most important agents who both directly and indirectly internalised the participants' strategy use in addition to other relevant aspects of language learning during their stays in their homelands. According to Kurata (2011: 7), gaining access to a myriad of target language resources, such as English textbooks or competent speakers of English, is in essence mediated through learners' personal social networks within their immediate learning settings.

In the business and management field, Krackhardt and Hanson (2011: 31) differentiate between two main types of social networks: trust and advice networks. The trust network is restricted to sharing confident and delicate information with others without taking a procedural action (i.e., a positive, indirect kind of involvement). Conversely, the advice network is formed by prominent players in an organisation, and their task is to solve problems and provide significant information (i.e., a positive, direct kind of involvement). Based on Krackhardt' and Hanson's (2011) distinction between trust and advice networks, along with the impacts of different social agents on the participants' strategic language engagement, three types of social networks were distinguished: trust, advice and constraining networks. The following diagram explains the suggested framework:

Figure 13: A Framework for explaining language learners' personal social networks



Coyle (2007: 77) proclaims that LLSs develop ‘as a by-product of classroom culture’, including interactions and relationships between individuals. As described in Section 6.4.1.3 of Chapter 6, English language teachers were critical mediators who represented mainly the participants’ ‘advice/guidance network’ and sometimes their ‘constraining network’, through passing on LLSs- especially the exam-oriented ones- to these participants and embracing a practice of ‘put exams first’ in their language teaching (Pan and Block, 2011: 399). Apart from Fadi and Zainab, the participants in this study were only taught English by Arab or Asian non-native speaker teachers during their academic lives in their homelands.

These six participants mentioned that English teachers in their learning past, in particular before commencing their undergraduate degrees, appeared to encourage ‘a fixed mindset’ rather than ‘a growth mindset’ (i.e., seeing one’s mental abilities such as intelligence as immovable and responsible for the success or failure in learning a language) (Mercer and Ryan, 2010: 437). More specifically, the teachers paid insufficient attention to the value of motivating the participants to take risks and to reflect on their own thinking to shape their desired possible self-image (Dörnyei and Kubanyiova, 2014). English lessons, as most participants claimed, lacked methodological variety since they were confined to text-based

reading, grammar and vocabulary exercises (see extracts N2, 188-194 and R3, 20-23 in Section 6.4.1.3 of Chapter 6). As Lamb and Budiyanto (2013: 26) state, English for both Asian and Arab learners is often taught as ‘a values-free body of knowledge conveyed via official textbooks and assessed in high-stakes exams’.

Ushioda (2011b: 12-13) has addressed this point, suggesting that most teachers in EFL contexts, including those in the current study, prefer to play safe by imbuing their students with the societal learning discourse, and see them as mere ‘language learners’ practising language rather than ‘people’ holding ‘an identity, a personality, a unique history and background, with goals, motives and intentions’. As an example, the overuse of memorisation and repetition strategies by most participants especially before going to university was noticeably intertwined with the practices of their teachers, who considered such strategies useful because of traditional exam-oriented learning and increasingly educational and professional competitions (Gitsaki, 2011; Tucker, 2014). In this sense, English seemed to lose its function as a ‘language for identification’ for many participants (Lamb and Budiyanto, 2013: 19) because they were basically motivated by fears of failure more than by a true vision of a future English-speaking self. Consequently, Ushioda (2011b) postulates that language learners should be allowed to ‘speak as themselves’ in the target language inside the classroom with their preferred ‘transportable identities’ (e.g., as football fan, keen tennis player, art lover):

When students are enabled to voice opinions, preferences, and values, align themselves with those of others, engage in discussion, struggle, resist, negotiate, compromise or adapt, their motivational dispositions and identities evolve and are given expression. (Ushioda, 2011b: 21)

Ushioda (2011b: 20) further contends that creating opportunities for language learners to engage and express themselves using the L2 may be accomplished through building continuity between their lives inside and outside the classroom, in the form of organising out-of-class projects and/or via introducing digital and mobile technologies, entertainment and social media into the educational settings, for instance. By giving language learners a legitimate voice in the classroom, ‘what they learn becomes part of what they are’ (Little, 2004: 106), and their future possible selves as users of English can be enhanced and sustained in the long run (Dörnyei and Kubanyiova, 2014: 111).

In the present study, two participants (Fadi and Zainab) who enrolled in outstanding private educational settings and were taught by many competent English teachers mentioned some strategies employed by their teachers to relate what these participants were learning to their own and real life. Examples of the strategies mediated by the teachers were to invite some native/competent speakers of English to the class to talk about different topics with students, using extra language learning materials related to current events and encouraging students to take part in English clubs and Book Reading Competitions organised by school (see extract Z2, 111-138 in Section 6.4.1.3 of Chapter 6). However, the use of technology-mediated learning artefacts inside the classroom was reasonably limited at this stage of the current study, as will be discussed in the coming section.

Palfreyman (2012: 171-172) gave us a good example of his endeavour to ‘tap into students’ worlds’ and ‘bring the world into the institution’ by inviting his female university students from the Arabian Gulf States to take any photograph with their own mobile camera phones to be shown as a presentation (with minimal explanation) in the classroom. Palfreyman (2012: 171) added that the resulting images became the starting point for dialogues among his students, and this was followed with a writing task, based on these images. Commenting on

the findings of his study, Palfreyman (2014: 189-190) elsewhere indicates that the use of a technology familiar to his students (the camera phone) in a familiar context caused them to raise ‘awareness of their everyday lives’ and express ‘one’s identity for a particular audience’. Palfreyman (2014: 190) further declares that the students represented ‘a cultural resource’ for him, because the images displayed in the classroom enabled him as a non-Arab teacher of English and ‘a stranger in a strange land’ to gain a comprehensive idea about foods, famous places, and customs of the context in which he was teaching.

The findings of this research suggest that the participants had little to say about their interactions with their counterparts throughout their educational lives in their homelands, because of the classroom environment, which was basically teacher-directed and competitive examination-oriented (Taylor, 2013a and b). By the same token, Mideros and Carter (2014: 137) state that a language classroom which is organised on ‘the basis of competition and confrontation is antithetical to cooperation and collaboration’. In effect, this finding is not in line with the apparently normal nature of Arab societies, usually described as ‘collectivist societies’ (Raddawi, 2011: 80). In collectivist societies, ‘people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups and are concerned about the harmony and the heritage of their society’ (ibid).

In addition to being formal agents, some informal social agents, mainly parents, influenced the participants’ strategic language learning behaviour, including their own language beliefs and motivations, simply because these participants were not born with their existing set of values and beliefs attached to learning English (Norton, 2014; Mercer, 2011). As demonstrated in Chapter 6, the socio-economic status of my participants’ parents related to their occupation, income and educational attainment seemed to play a pervasive role in identifying the amount and kind of support they offered their children while learning English

(Block, 2012; Zaragoza, 2014). Although the participants, excluding Rama, belonged to better-off families, the parents of participants who were educated in the public sector represented only ‘trust networks’ for these participants, by engaging indirectly in their children’s language learning in the form of emotional and/or financial support, such as by encouraging them to ‘study hard’ and providing English learning materials ordered by the participants in addition to financing private English tuition classes for them while preparing for the TOEFL/IELTS test (see extracts M2, 133-146 and J2, 102-131 in Section 6.4.1.2 of Chapter 6).

In effect, the influence of these parents on the participants’ English learning was, in Kyriacou and Zhu’s (2008: 101) words, ‘largely benign’, and appeared at a late stage of their academic lives i.e., after entering university and realising the role that English could play in their children’s future. Since parents especially mothers were less than well-educated, they were unlikely to be able to offer any practical or direct support to their children in relation to their development as strategic language learners. This finding resonates somewhat with that of Palfreyman (2011: 29-30), who found that the effects of immediate family members on a group of Emirati university students’ language improvement were confined to oral encouragement (i.e., a positive, indirect kind of involvement), mainly because the parents were less educated and non-proficient in English. This is also echoed by Lamb (2013a: 24-25), who reported that none of the rural parents in his study on a group of young adolescent learners in rural Indonesia had articulated ‘optimal ways of learning’ English for their children, and ‘they were not proactive’. Their support was limited to ‘the frequent invocation of the power of prayer’ because of the lack of money and education of these parents (ibid).

On the other hand, it has been shown in Chapter 6 that the parents of the other three participants who were educated in tuition-charging private formal settings (Fadi, Yazn and

Zainab) were highly educated and financially stable, and they simultaneously formulated the trust and advice networks of their children. Their parents enabled them to enact their future self-image confidently as English speakers, by adopting a variety of strategies such as by sending them intentionally to outstanding private schools from the beginning of their lives, practising English with them inside the house, offering them some technology-mediated language resources and encouraging them to complete their higher studies in the UK (see extracts Y1, 14-19; F1, 34-44 and Z2, 55-60 in Section 6.4.1.2 of Chapter 6) (Zaragoza, 2014).

It should be noted that the reference made by many participants to the direct effects of their brothers or sisters on their language learning and strategy use could point to an increasing mindfulness of the new generation in the Arabic-speaking world as regards the significance of English in one's life. For instance, Zainab (in extract No. Z4, 18-20) elucidated her eldest brother's tenacious efforts to enhance her English by using English at certain times in daily life, listening to English music together and letting her read some English novels in his personal library. In this sense, Gitsaki (2011: p.xiii) in the preface to her volume on teaching and learning in the Arab world has emphasised the rapidly rising interest in English by Arabs in the twenty-first century: 'Education is undergoing significant change globally and locally. In the Arab States, globalization and economic development have had a significant effect on [English language] education'.

8.3.2.2 Effects of Assessment Modes in the Arab World on the Participants' Strategy

Use

According to Damerow and Bailey (2014: 8), although the issue of language assessment in the Arabic-speaking world has been gaining increased attention in recent years, almost all of these writings (e.g., Davinson et al., 2005; Esseili, 2014; Rumsey, 2014) were undertaken from language teachers' viewpoints (ibid). Therefore, the current research has attempted to fill these gaps in the literature by exploring in depth how the participants' strategy choice and beliefs about the value of each kind of assessment varied in accordance with their own visions of possible, 'ought to' and ideal selves (Dörnyei, 2009, 2014), which was in turn the outcome of the ongoing interplay between the human agency of these participants and a multitude of situated contextual realities such as the teaching practices of tutors (Benson and Cooker, 2013a; Palfryman, 2014). It seems essential to reiterate here that this longitudinal research may be viewed as the first empirical study in the field of LLS research that has attempted to unravel the somewhat intertwined relationships between language learners' strategy use, motivations and visions of themselves in the future over a long period of time (see Table 15).

With the exception of Fadi and Zainab, summative assessment (typically at the end of semester and school year) was the only kind of assessment applied in the formal educational settings of the other participants in their Arab homelands. According to Ur (2012), summative assessment is normally carried out by the class teacher or by an external authority, and merely provides

a grade, often expressed as a percentage, offers no specific feedback on aspects of performance, and is designed to summarize or conclude a period of learning...[it] may be used as final school grades, or for acceptance into further education or

employment. It may contribute little or nothing to ongoing teaching and learning (Ur (2012, 167-168).

In the present study, this kind of assessment seemed to enhance the prevention aspect of instrumentality (i.e. avoidance of feared or negative end states) associated with the ought-to L2 self, which was tied to a short-term goal such as studying in order not to fail or foil their parents' expectations (Dörnyei and Kubanyiova, 2014; Ushioda, 2014) (see Section 8.3.1 in this Chapter). In this sense, the participants' choice and use of LLSs in their homelands were markedly influenced by the goal of doing well in their final examinations. Accordingly, they focused on 'the format effect of the exams' they underwent (Jiang and Sharpling, 2011: 55). This might be partially attributed to the fact that the final examination results were predominately viewed as the sole, 'gold standard measure' (Stupnisky et al., 2014: 151) of the participants' English proficiency, in particular those studying in state educational settings. For example, the participants who were educated in state educational settings largely used the strategies regulated by their English teachers throughout their schooling- strategies such as rote oral and written repetition of some new vocabulary, memorising by heart grammar rules, texts and decontextualised lists of vocabulary, along with completing the book exercises assigned by teachers for the exam. They did so because grammar and vocabulary skills constituted the largest proportion of the total score in their final exams (Esseili, 2014: 110).

After going to university, English for five participants (Khaled, Jamal, Mouza, Nasser and Yazn) became the medium of instruction in the teaching of the content courses of some university subjects. At this stage, the use of multiple choice testing was the primary method of assessing knowledge and passing the university subjects at the end of each term (Van-de-Hoven, 2014: 66-67). In response to this kind of assessment, these participants directed their attention to subject-specific content, using other exam-oriented strategies such as a meditative way of reading materials, recycling notes and memorising chunks of language. Related to

this, these participants after their entry into university also used a number of voluntary strategies beyond the class to improve their language skills and to be able to comprehend the lectures- strategies such as watching English programmes and films with Arabic subtitles in their spare time and listening to English music along with enrolling in private supplementary tutoring. This matter outwardly enhanced the belief that there was a dissonance between most participants' language learning in in-school and out-of-school contexts (Lai and Gu, 2011; Lai, 2014), as will be further explain in section related to 'application of technologies as mediating material artefacts'.

Unlike the other participants, the experiential accounts of Fadi and Zainab (and to a lesser extent Yazn) revealed that there was to some extent a balance between formative assessment (e.g. class discussions, group work with peer feedback, student self-assessment) and final exams during some stages of their educational histories in their homelands. Ur (2012: 168) indicates that anyone can be the agent in formative assessment, including teachers, peers and learners themselves. Ur (ibid) further postulates that

It [formative assessment] may, like summative assessment, provide a grade in the form of a number, but it happens in the middle of a period of learning rather than at the end, provides clear feedback in the form of error correction and suggestions for improvement and has the primary aim of enhancing future learning (Ur: 2012, 168).

As reported in Section 6.4.1.3 of Chapter 6, the teaching practices of some English teachers of Fadi and Zainab (and to a lesser extent Yazn) fostered formative assessment, for instance by encouraging students to work together on discussion-based tasks, providing detailed feedback on their homework, asking students to make oral presentations, organising a Book Reading Competition during the year and motivating students to join English clubs organised by the school and visited sometimes by Europeans. These formative assessment practices undertaken by some teachers seemingly played a role in leading these three participants to

display a higher level of ‘international posture’ and the promotion aspect of instrumentality (i.e. aspiration towards a desired end state) related to long-term learning goals than the other ones (Ortega, 2009; Yashima, 2009, 2013) (see Section 8.3.1 for more elaboration of the construct of ‘International Posture’). With this in mind, the strategies used by three participants (Fadi, Yazn and Zainab) were not confined to repetition and memorisation strategies (i.e. exam-oriented strategies) as many of the others taught in public schools. For example, they were willing to use English with their non-Arab classmates and were equipped with information about other cultures in their homelands. Additionally, they were cognisant of the potential of English for their future careers at an early stage of their lives (see extracts No. F1, 34-44 and Z2, 55-60 in Section 6.4.2.2 of Chapter 6).

The above discussion aligns with Gao’s (2010a: 153) claim that the different contextual affordances (e.g., social agents, assessment mode, learning discourses, and material artefacts) that internalised the participants’ thinking and strategy deployment often operated jointly. To clarify this point further, Fadi and Zainab were sent by their parents at an early age to outstanding private schools in which English was emphasised. In these schools, the communicative approach to language teaching was implemented by many teachers, and both summative and affirmative kinds of assessment were often applied (Besser and Chik, 2014). The participants also exercised their agency by reacting positively to such a ‘resource-rich language environment’ (Palfreyman, 2014: 178). This in turn led them to use a variety of LLSs, and formulate a more developed self-image than the other participants (Gao, 2013a; Lamb, 2013a).

8.3.2.3 The Role of Human Agency in Regulating the Participants' Strategy Use in their Arab Homelands

The aforementioned discussion of the data has affirmed the crucial role of contextual realities in scaffolding the participants' strategy use and their future possible selves. However, the contextual realities consisting of social, cultural and material artefacts held an *influential* rather than a *determining* impact on the participants' strategic language learning efforts because their strategy use and learning goals cannot be properly interpreted without projecting their human agency into putting strenuous efforts into learning English as documented in the data. The construct of agency in this research study was treated as 'a defining attribute of agents that places them in the position of being subjects who can think, desire, and act' (Gao, 2013b: 227). In effect, the findings of the present study concur with Palfreyman's (2014: 183) assertion that language learners 'will not be simply swept along in the stream of schooling/work/life, but will make efforts to float, swim and navigate to some extent according to his/her own purposes'. To enhance this claim related to the issue of agency, two main points need further illustration:

First, the participants' powers of critical reflection and thinking upon their language learning experiences and strategy use in their homelands were manifest in the present research study (Benson and Cooker, 2013b; Gao, 2010a, 2013a and b). They were most suspicious of exam-oriented learning efforts and their possible effect on learning English, as in extracts J2, 22-32 and M4, 14-18 of Section 6.4.2.2 in Chapter 6. Additionally, they were capable of critically evaluating which LLSs they acquired from the socialisation process were useful or not. For example, Zainab (in extract Z2, 111-138, Section 6.4.1.3) felt that her elder brother's intervention in the learning process was appropriate, whereas Jamal (in extract J2, 102-131) gave a less central position to his sister's mediating role.

The participants, especially those educated in public educational settings, affirmed that much of what they had been doing had only limited significance, relating only to achieving examination success. This issue suggests that the participants were ready to embrace a diverse set of LLSs once they were allowed to do so by a change in circumstances or by ‘*key transformational episodes*’ in Dörnyei and Ushioda’s words (2011: 68, authors’ emphasis). Rama’s case can vividly exemplify this point. She reported adjustments in her LLS use in response to her changing learning goals and conditions, because after being employed as a teaching assistant in her university, she wanted to gain the required score on TOEFL/IELTS in order to be sent to the UK and to accomplish her ultimate vision of being the first university lecturer in her village. Such reflexivity may be seen as an expression of the participants’ agentic behaviour. As Gao (2013b: 228) aptly pinpoints, ‘the very reference to constraints or enablement in the learners’ descriptions of contextual and structural conditions is indicative of agency as it speaks for their intentionality’.

Second, although three participants (Fadi, Yazn and Zainab) were more fortunate than the others since they were educated in tuition-charging private formal settings in which English was emphasised along with receiving numerous types of support from their immediate family members to instil positive attitudes towards learning English in them, having such a resource-rich language environment should not be conceived as underestimating the potential role of the participants’ agency in choosing the appropriate language strategies and formulating their own desires and visions by themselves, as Besser and Chick (2014: 306) claim. More specifically, the three participants, to varying degrees, explicated in many incidents how agentic they were by seizing the language opportunities offered by some critical mediators and investing more time in learning and practising English across different settings, especially after going to university. For example, Yazn, the Jordanian participant, recalled his endeavours to seek opportunities to be in contact with competent/native speakers of English

in informal settings to improve his English before going to the UK, by visiting some English university students living in a dormitory in addition to working voluntarily in an organisation responsible for finding accommodation for European people working in Jordan. In this sense, the participants' willingness to take advantage of the supportive resources offered to them in terms of language learning reflected their agentic behaviour, because the presence of the 'enabling language resources' in an individual's life, as Palfreyman (2014: 177) suggests, 'does not guarantee that they will contribute to learning' or that that individual will invest these sources in their language development as well (see also Flowerdew and Miller, 2008).

Building on the above discussion, it may be inferred that the participants' language learning motivations and their strategy deployment were the outcome of the close-knit intersection between their agentic power and a multitude of situated contextual realities, including material, cultural and social resources.

8.3.3 RQ3 What are the changes in the participants' strategy use and their future self-image after arrival in the UK?

In addressing this research question, I utilised the conceptual framework developed and used in attempting to answer the first research question of the present study (see Table 15). This framework was underpinned by socio-dynamic perspectives, and aimed to disentangle the dialectic between the participants' language learning goals, motivations and strategy use, on the grounds that LLSs cannot stand by themselves and are constantly intertwined with 'a learner's disposition' which entails 'a pre-existing readiness for something' as Littlejohn (2008: 11) claims, i.e., LLSs are always goal-oriented (for more elaboration of this framework, see Section 8.2 in this Chapter).

As revealed in the data presented in Chapter 7, the eight participants' study abroad experiences in the UK acted as 'one of the most traumatic events' in their lives (Brown and Holloway, 2008: 33), because these participants were required in their first trip away from home to step out of their 'comfort zone, both personally and linguistically' (Benson et al, 2013: 102). As a result, there were conspicuous changes in the participants' strategy use and their future self-guides, both across different research stages and within the same stage in the new learning environment. This matter is depicted in the Table below:

Table 16: Participants' goals, motivations and strategy use in the UK with reference to the framework developed in the current study

Items	2 nd stage: pre-sessional course		3 rd stage: first and second semesters of MA degree courses	4 th stage: last semester of the participants' MA degree courses
	Phase 1	Phase 2		
Learning goals	'Aschematic' or unrealistic goals	Short-term (proximal) goals (i.e. having a clear purpose in mind to learn English for immediate, material gains)	Long-term (distal) goals (raising knowledge about their specialisations and gaining a respectable job when going back to their homelands) - English proficiency is strongly related to successful job-hunting	A developed version of their Long-term (distal) goals or visions (i.e., trying to apply what they had learnt in the UK in their future jobs to benefit their countries, reading more about their own research).
Learning motivation	having little incentive to approach language learning in a strategic manner	An 'instrumental-prevention' focus, related to the ' <i>ought-to self</i> ' (i.e., trying to meet the expectations of others, and to avoid possible negative outcomes. It is less	An 'instrumental-promotion' focus, related to the ' <i>the ideal L2 self</i> ' (i.e., more internalised within one's self) along with developing their 'international posture'	Integrativeness and/or an 'instrumental-promotion' focus, related to the ' <i>the ideal L2 self</i> ' (i.e., more internalised within one's self) and growing 'national

		internalised within one's self)		interest' i.e. benefiting their countries
Language learning strategies	Lack of defined learning strategies to achieve the stated goals	The dominant use of other-imposed strategies (to not thwart one's family back home) with some voluntary strategies (to help them adapt themselves to the new context)	A balance between the use of voluntary and compulsory/other-imposed strategies	The dominant use of voluntary strategies over the other-imposed strategies

8.3.3.1 Second Research Stage: 'Aschematic' to Short-term Goals with Associated LLSs

The future visions of almost all the participants in the first six weeks of their stays in the UK while attending the pre-sessional English course seemed to hold the character of fantasy, rather than tangible ambition. More precisely, in that stage they had what Pizzolato (2006: 59) terms 'aschematic' future selves, on the grounds that although all participants at my first meeting with them emphasised that attaining academic qualifications through the medium of English to benefit them in their future careers after returning home constituted their overarching goal of coming to the UK, almost all of them (excluding Zainab) articulated other relatively far-reaching goals, without identifying the learning strategies that they intended to espouse to achieve these goals (see also Jackson, 2008). For example, Rama and Nasser (in extracts R5, 144-148 in Section 7.2.2.3 and N5, 112-114 in Section 7.2.2.2 of Chapter 7) anticipated that they would be capable of speaking English like native speakers after spending a limited time period in the UK without undertaking any strategic behaviour, similar to a child's attempt to acquire their mother tongues. During their early months in the UK, these participants appeared to elevate the role of the learning environment over working in an active or strategic manner. As a result, Dörnyei (2014: 17) pinpoints the essential

feature of accomplishing one's desired future vision by stating that 'it subsumes both a desired goal and a representation of how the individual approaches or realises that goal'.

The most likely explanation for this finding is given by Ryan and Mercer (2011: 170-171), namely that there is a strong belief among many language learners and some practitioners that 'if the learner can go abroad to this perceived 'perfect' language learning environment, then learning should occur naturally without the need for any effort or conscious reflection on the part of the learner'. This belief in turn, as Gao and Lamb (2011: 6) argue, would lead to a diminishing of the pivotal role of learners' agency in regulating their language learning process, and a concession that an extended period of time in a country where the target language is spoken can effortlessly validate their new identity as language users. For this reason, Ryan and Irie (2014: 120) emphasise the crucial role of learner agency in the construction of one's possible selves, in order to avoid 'maladaptive behaviour, such as the setting of unrealistic or impractical goals'. Ryan and Mercer (2011: 163-164) further suggest that in order to promote the worth of a study abroad experience, language learners need to be empowered with 'a growth mindset', by encouraging them to set realistic goals and 'approach work or study in a purposeful strategic manner'.

In effect, the presence of some contradictions among the participants between what they would have preferred to do and what they actually did, especially during the first phase of the pre-sessional English course, might be partially attributed to their lack of prior travel experience, according to Benson et al (2013: 152). It seems vital to reiterate here that I decided in this longitudinal research study to rely on qualitative methods to collect my data, because the questionnaire surveys used in almost all previous studies on Arab learners' strategy use in language learning replicated learners' expressed strategy preferences rather than capturing the dynamic and fluid nature of their strategy use (Gao, 2004; Rose, 2012;

Wray and Hajar, 2014) (see Section 2.3.1 in Chapter 2 for more details about criticisms of excessive use of survey methods in LLS research).

In Section 2.5.1.1 of Chapter 2, I described how an affinity between Leontiev's (1981) version of activity theory and the understanding of strategy use from a sociocultural stance exists, on the grounds that both of them understand 'the human world as an open system, which can be modified depending on contextual changes and on learners' recognition of them' (Kim, 2010: 3). That is, changing conditions can drive individuals to implement a different set of LLSs and/or reactivate some of them. For example, the participants' diary entries and experiential accounts during the second phase of the pre-session course of the present study revealed their gradual awareness of the fact that community integration may take a long time, and accordingly, they started to set concrete goals by reacting positively to the writing strategies mediated by their English tutors while writing a micro research project-strategies such as finding resources, making referencing and avoiding plagiarism (see extracts J7, 39-46, N8, 99-113 and Y6, 122-135 in Section 7.2.3.3 of Chapter 7).

All participants felt that their futures could be at risk if they did not develop their writing skills, since academic writing requirements would constitute an essential form of assessment in their MA programmes (Bailey, 2013; Lillis and Scott, 2007). As Górska (2013: 191) appositely remarks, 'the inability to write academic texts puts international students in danger of failing their courses, and may lead to interruption of studies or, more gravely, to their abandoning or being dropped from their programmes'. This finding pertaining to paying special attention to writing strategies somewhat affirms that the prevention aspect of instrumentality associated with the ought-to L2 self which dominated the participants' motivational discourses in the early stages of their stay in the UK. More specifically, their driving force was principally to avoid possible negative consequences in terms of failure and

returning home in disgrace (see extract N8, 99-113 in Section 7.2.3.3 of Chapter 7) (Malcolm, 2011, 2013; Ushioda, 2014).

Considering this finding, it may be inferred that although the participants in the UK appeared to enjoy having more freedom in terms of selecting the strategies that they themselves believed necessary to use especially after departing from the extremely exam-oriented nature of the education system, the strategy choice of most participants was often still influenced by previously context-mediated motivational discourses, mainly during their early months in the UK (Gao, 2008a).

8.3.3.2 Third Research Stage: Integrativeness to International Posture with Associated LLSs

As described in Section 8.3.1, the participants, especially those educated in state academic settings, exemplified a low degree of ‘international posture’ before their arrival in the UK. ‘International posture’ includes an interest in intercultural friendship and international affairs, a willingness to go overseas to study or work and openness to other cultures (Kehrwald, 2013; Yashima, 2009, 2013). This important motivational construct was introduced by Yashima (2002: 145) to explore language learners’ motivational orientations in EFL contexts, in which direct interactions with native speakers of English are often scarce. As a result, the influence of ‘international posture’ was only examined by some researchers in EFL contexts (e.g. Peng, 2014; Sampasvam and Clément, 2014; Yashima, 2013). Nonetheless, the present study revealed that most participants (apart from Nasser and Rama) exhibited a higher level of ‘international posture’ in the first and second semester of their MA programmes in the UK.

This matter was made manifest through their openness to other cultures, along with an intensification of their ties with multinational social networks more than with native speakers of English at that stage (Montgomery, 2009, 2010). This finding might be attributed to the fact that almost all participants possessed dual goals in the first two terms of their MA programmes: (1) their immediate goal was passing their modules (preferably with high marks) and (2) their long-term dominant goal was increasing knowledge in their major fields of study and the recent developments from any available resource, including their international colloques (i.e. English became the language of knowledge). For example, Jamal and Zainab mentioned that they approached their Indian and Polish classmates to learn from them the ways of becoming more analytical in their assignments (see extracts J10, 43-65 and Z12, 143-148). Additionally, the participants living on the university campus increased their interactions with their flatmates at the third stage of data analysis, for instance by sharing meals and exchanging ideas about their cultures and customs (see Section 7.3.2.4 in Chapter 7).

In effect, there was a balance between the use of voluntary and compulsory/other-imposed strategies during the third research stage. That is, while they focused on the learning materials and references identified by their tutors to write their assignments (see extracts J10, 68-69 and Z9, 22-48 in Section 7.3.3.1), they used many voluntary strategies to widen their knowledge about their specialisation or to improve their English. Examples of these voluntary strategies were reading and writing poems (Zainab), watching British programmes with English subtitles (Nasser and Rama) or without them (Fadi, Khaled, Yazn and Zainab) and incorporating a multitude of technologies (electronic dictionaries installed on their laptops, Dropbox, Mendeley Desktop, Mindjet and SkyDrive) in their educational lives, principally to save time and organise their academic work (all participants).

An integrative motivation factor emerged in the case of Fadi more than in the other individual cases in this research. Given that achieving an individual's future visions of the 'ideal L2 self' entails 'having an accompanying plan of action' (Islam et al., 2013: 2), Fadi deployed many strategies to identify himself with British individuals and English culture- strategies, such as sharing an apartment with two British students, purchasing local magazines and newspapers to keep up to date with all the latest news in the UK, strengthening his relationship with his British colleagues at hospital and attempting to use any new slang words in his daily life.

8.3.3.3 Fourth Research Stage: Personal and National Interest with Associated LLSs

While 'international posture' dominated the participants' motivational orientations during the third research stage by demonstrating their keenness to communicate with other international students to fulfil their own aspirations for academic and intercultural gains, the participants (excluding Rama) in the exit stage of the research produced a developed version of their ultimate visions of the 'ideal L2 self' by identifying goals at both individual and national levels. Islam et al. (2013: 4) proposed a new construct of 'National Interest', which includes 'attitudes towards national socio-economic development, national integrity and the projection of a positive group/national image in the international arena'. Although Rama's aspirations were to complete her master's degrees successfully in order to be the first university lecturer in her village, the other participants divulged that their MA research projects could benefit their own native country and fellow citizens (see Section 7.4.2.1 in Chapter 7). For example, Zainab would attempt to publish a report in an Iraqi scientific magazine about the best practical steps for managing healthcare projects in Iraq. Jamal also was eager to go back to Libya to teach his students the best teaching methods that suit their needs.

Most of the strategies used by the participants during the last research stage were voluntary strategies, such as watching YouTube videos related to SPSS for data analysis, drawing a mindmap for each chapter that summed up the main points, and setting their own deadlines to complete each chapter of their dissertations. The next section will discuss the factors that influenced the participants' changing use of LLSs and their learning motivations and goals.

8.3.4 RQ4 What influences the participants' changes in their strategy use after arrival in the UK?

The eight participants' study abroad experiences in the UK acted as 'one of the most traumatic events' in their lives (Brown and Holloway, 2008: 33) because they were required, in their first trip away from home, to step out of their 'comfort zone, both personally and linguistically' (Benson et al, 2013: 102). In discussing the previous research question, it has been demonstrated that there were noticeable changes in the participants' strategy use, learning motivations and indeed self-images during their stay in the UK. The above research question discusses the factors that regulated the participants' strategic language efforts after their entry into the UK.

8.3.4.1 Effects of Assessment Modes in the UK on the Participants' Strategy Use

To date there has been no empirical study that critically examines the impacts of assessment methods on Arab learners' shifting use of LLSs and their learning beliefs while studying abroad in an English-medium education university. Therefore, this study has attempted to fill this gap to some extent.

The analysis in Chapter 7 found that both summative and formative kinds of assessments were applied in the English-medium university of the UK at which the participants attended. The participants' reactions to the different assessments they experienced in the UK were in essence shaped by their changing language learning goals along with their past language learning experiences (Jiang and Sharpling, 2011: 55-56). In the pre-session English course, the participants were assessed more by formative measures, such as through class discussions, group work with peer feedback, an oral presentation and a micro written project. Although this course did not involve high stakes exams, and the participants appeared to enjoy having more freedom in selecting the strategies that they themselves believed necessary to use after departing the extremely exam-oriented nature of the education system, the strategy choice of most participants was often still shaped by the previously context-mediated motivational discourses, mainly during their early months in the UK (Parks and Raymond, 2004).

To clarify this point further, the participants (apart from Zainab) were less conscientious in dealing with cooperative activities introduced by their tutors, describing them as 'fun' and 'sometimes unimpressive' (see Extracts No. F7, 66-68 and M8, 121-145 in Section 7.2.3.4 of Chapter 7). This finding appeared to be attributed to two reasons (1) the mark was unimportant to most participants, since they had already attained an unconditional offer to join their MA programmes, and (2) the nature of a pre-session English course as it was only attended by international students (mostly Chinese), who were accustomed to striving for the final examination results in their homelands more than improving their English in the long run (Dörnyei and Kubanyiova, 2014; Pan and Block, 2011). Zainab's account of the indifferent behaviours that many of her Asian classmates exhibited in dealing with a team oral presentation could replicate the fact that international students on some occasions might

take much longer than expected to adapt themselves to the changes in assessment modes (see Extract Z8, 138-155 in Section 7.2.3.3 of Chapter 7).

This finding related to the participants' gradual adaptation to the new assessment practices in the UK is not in line with that of Gao (2006a, 2010a). Gao (2006a, 2010a) found in his longitudinal studies on Chinese university students' strategy use in Britain and Hong Kong respectively that his participants responded positively and directly to the changing mode of assessment in the new context; namely, coursework assessment in English. According to Gao (2006a, 2010a), this change in assessment methods led his participants to replace the directly exam-oriented strategies (memorisation and repetition strategies) used in China with a different strategic approach based on 'language in use' as a result of lifting the examination pressure in the new context in Britain and Hong Kong.

As illustrated in Section 8.3.3.1 of this Chapter, all participants during their attendance on the pre-sessional English course valued academic writing classes, and worked hard on their written projects (1200-1500 words). They did so because a typical means of assessment in their MA academic programmes would be related to writing assignments, and thus, they wished to learn 'how to write an effective piece of academic writing' (Jiang and Sharpling, 2011: 55; see also Górska, 2013). This finding related to the participants' particular focus on the written project more than any other kind of assessment practices could be viewed as an example of practising their agentive power. As Kramsch (2013: 195) aptly puts it, language learners are no longer 'simply moved to learn what others teach them. They can exercise agency, claim their rights to be heard..., and strive to become whoever they want to be'. In this view, the participants were pushed into learning the writing strategies (e.g. referencing and avoiding plagiarism) taught by their tutors after recognising the salience of these strategies to their academic success.

After joining their postgraduate programmes in the UK, all participants were assessed by means of written assignments, and sometimes by collaborative group work. As seen in Section 7.3.2.3 of Chapter 7, the participants apart from Fadi divulged that their assignment scores in the first term of their MA programmes were below their expectations, because they were not fully aware that they ‘needed not only to understand and document a number of items of literature written in non-native language, but also to try to adopt critical thinking strategies’ (Jiang and Sharpling, 2011: 49). In this sense, improving English was no longer the only prominent goal because the focus came to be more on ‘meaningful writing’ (ibid: 56).

Critical thinking is defined by Bailey (2011: 27) as the ability of ‘not just passively accepting what you hear or read, but instead actively questioning and assessing’. With the exception of Fadi, the other participants claimed that they received inadequate support either from their English tutors on the pre-session course or from subject lecturers in relation to what critical thinking skills were required in a particular disciplinary area (see Extracts No. J10, 43-65 and 143-148 in Section 7.3.2.2 of Chapter 7). This finding reflects the view of Górska (2013), who examined the perspectives of international students from South-East Asia on responding to academic writing requirements in UK higher education. According to Górska (2013: 205), although her participants gave a positive evaluation to the generic writing support offered by their tutors in the pre-session English course in comparison to that in their home countries, this kind of support was ‘insufficient in preparing students for writing in academic disciplines’. As a result, the participants of the present study exercised their agency and adopted some strategies to improve their skills in critical analysis/thinking by, for instance, soliciting help from their most able European counterparts (Zainab and Jamal), watching some videos online about the notion of critical thinking in assignments (Khaled and Yazn),

borrowing books from the University library about writing postgraduate assignments critically (Mouza) and reading former students' essays (Nasser).

As articulated by most participants, writing a dissertation and many assignments in the UK constituted a major factor in enabling them to be less obsessed with examination scores, and more concerned about increasing their breadth of knowledge in the subject specialisation to be employed in their future careers (i.e. a long-term dominant goal) (see Extracts No. M10, 167-173 and J10, 177-1179 in Section 7.3.3.2 of Chapter 7). Based on this finding, it may be argued that the participants' language learning beliefs, learning motivations and strategy use were not static but emergent, dynamic and contextually-situated. This was because these participants reinforced and modified their language learning beliefs and strategy use during the process of ongoing interactions with a multitude of contextual realities (e.g. assessment modes and tutors' teaching practices) in the community in which they were working (Mercer, 2011: 107-108; Peng, 2014: 25-26). For example, there were shifts in the strategies used by the participants for dealing with the new vocabularies. For example, all participants claimed that they started using the context to guess the meanings of new vocabularies or sometimes would ask their conversational partner for clarification or even look the vocabularies up in electronic dictionaries installed on their laptops (Gao, 2003). In this sense, the reviewing or rote learning strategies that many of them used to employ heavily in their homelands were markedly less reported in the new context (especially after the start of their MA programmes), mainly because of the changing mode of assessment.

8.3.4.2 Impacts of the Participants' Social Networks on their Strategy Use and Future Self-image

It has been discussed in Section 8.3.2.1 of this chapter that language teachers and family members, in particular parents, were the most prominent social agents who both directly and indirectly regulated the participants' English language learning experiences and strategy use in their homelands (Gao, 2010a, 2012). After coming to the UK, the role of participants' peers in mediating the participants' linguistic, academic and intercultural development and the use of strategies appeared to manifest itself, in particular in the third research stage (Benson et al, 2013). Furthermore, the quantity and quality of the support offered by teachers and family members to the participants varied over their time in the UK, as will be shown in the following discussion.

8.3.4.2.1 Effects of Family Members on the Participants' Strategy Use and Future Self-Guides

As explored in Chapter 7, the impact of family members, mostly parents, on the participants' future self-guides and strategy use did not actually disappear in spite of being geographically distant (Montgomery, 2010: 68-70). More specially, all participants, especially in the second research stage, were under great stress, because they wanted to prove to their parents that they were successful on both the academic and personal levels (i.e. being able to be independent and complete their MA programmes successfully) (see Section 7.2.2.1). This finding could justify the dominance of 'instrumental-preventative' motivation (i.e. avoidance of feared or negative end states) in the participants' discourses in the first three months in the UK (Lamb, 2012; Magid, 2011). Lamb (2012: 1001-1002) has echoed this point when stating

that the ought-to self-dimension in the L2 motivation ‘might be more relevant in Asian or Arab cultures where young people have shown themselves to be more susceptible to the influence of significant others’. Malcolm (2013: 111), for example, found that most of her Saudi students studying for the medicine degree through the medium of English in one the largest-established Bahraini Universities were influenced by ‘the negative vision of returning home as a dropout (‘a loser’) and the problems this would create for their family’. One of Malcolm’s (2013: 103) participants put it like this: ‘I [was] very, very afraid to fail. I will disappoint my family, and myself, and my relatives. All of them see me in a good position, then I [am] back in [my home]. Bad picture’.

Likewise, in Magid’s (2011) study to investigate the motivational orientations of a group of Chinese university students at a British University with reference to Dörnyei’s (2009b) L2 motivational self-system, Magid (2011: 182-183) noted that the preventional dimensions of instrumentality such as saving face, responsibility and family pressure were repeatedly articulated by his participants, who ‘not only want to not fail their English examinations, but they are also concerned about disappointing their parents by not finding a suitable job’. Nonetheless, Magid’s (2011) study was broadly concerned with the motivational characteristics of his Chinese learners of English more than the dynamic nature of their strategic language learning efforts including their motivations and self-image in response to the changing contexts, as the present research intended to disclose. In addition, the focus of Magid’s (2011) study was markedly restricted to the influences of informal social agents (i.e. parents and relatives) on his participants’ motivational discourses and language beliefs. Coming to the present study, it has emphasised the influential impact of both formal (i.e., language teachers) and informal social agents (i.e. siblings, parents or peers) on the Arab postgraduate participants’ strategic language efforts from a sociocultural standpoint.

One of the interesting findings reported by Jamal, the Libyan participant, in the third stage of this research, was that his two five and six-year-old children played a role in fostering his listening and speaking skills and sharpening his vocabulary through the fact that he sometimes used English with them in their daily communication along with occasionally watching the Disney programmes with them (see Extract No. J10, 21-23 in Section 7.3.2.4). This finding may not be in line with the traditional parent-child roles, on the grounds that parents tend to signify as the core members who have profound impacts on their children's language learning processes (Pinter, 2011: 11-12). However, Field (2005: 120) postulates that nowadays 'the flow of socialization within contemporary families is increasingly multi-directional' and cases of what Field (2005) calls 'inverse socialization' could include parents developing their language skills through their children, as in Jamal's case. In addressing this point, Hall and Guéry (2010: 24) coined the term 'child language brokering' to signify the positive influences that children might exert directly or indirectly on their parents' learning a new language when moving from one country to another. This may be regarded as a fruitful area for further research.

8.3.4.2.2 The Participants' Perspectives on Native Speakers as Models in English Teaching

As described in 8.3.2.1 of this Chapter, the participants in this research (apart from Fadi, Yazn and Zainab) were only taught English by Arab and/or Asian non-native speaker teachers during their academic lives in their homelands. In these participants' accounts of past language learning experiences, a large number of English language teachers appeared to function as the participants' 'constraining network' rather than their 'advice/guidance network' (i.e. a direct and positive involvement in the participants' language learning

processes), through adopting a practice of ‘put exams first’ in their language teaching (Pan and Block, 2011: 399), limiting the participants’ opportunities to use English inside and outside the classroom along with disregarding their needs to express their private visions of their future possible self (Dörnyei and Kubanyiova, 2014; Taylor, 2013a and b) (see Extracts No. N2, 188-194, No. R3, 20-23 and J3, 123-131 in Section 6.4.1.3 of Chapter 6). As Taylor (2013a: 46) argues, a considerable number of non-native English-speaking teachers in developing countries tend to ‘leave no room for reflection and subjectivity-either in determining the learning content or in how information is used, interpreted or understood’. Based on this, many participants seemed to possess ‘a fixed mindset’ in their homelands, believing that mastering English was largely ‘a natural, innate ability’ or ‘giftedness’, and that their English could only be improved after arrival in the UK and taught by native speakers of English (Mercer, 2011: 109; see also Dweck, 2006). With this in mind, Taylor (2013b: 15) emphasises that the classroom is ‘a micro social setting that leaves its social-ideological mark on students’ identity through the mediation of teacher beliefs and practices’.

In the pre-sessional English course attended by the participants, the majority of tutors were native English speakers. Indeed, as articulated by the participants, the teaching practices of many tutors appeared largely to encourage ‘a growth mindset’ (i.e. an individual’s linguistic capabilities can be developed through effort) (Mercer, 2011: 110). These tutors treated the participants as ‘real people’ by prominently acknowledging and valuing their opinions and answers in addition to encouraging the participants sometimes to bring their own real world into the language classroom by, for instance, allowing them to choose the oral presentation topic and discussing with their classmates the things that they had listened to on English radio (Palfreyman, 2012; Taylor, 2013a and b; Ushioda, 2011b) (see Extracts Z8, 71-90 and R7, 54-77 in Section 7.2.3.3). Nonetheless, two participants (Nasser and Rama) felt that they were ‘unlucky’ because one of their tutors was a non-native speaker of English, whereas the

other participants were happy to be taught by only British tutors (see Extract M6, 122-128 in Section 7.2.3.2).

In accordance with the participants' verbal accounts of language learning and strategy use in the UK, this finding related to the participants' oriented motives for being taught only by NSOE could be partially attributed to three main reasons: (1) having negative experiences with most Arab teachers of English in their homelands, (2) considering NSOE as being more experienced and knowledgeable about the best language teaching methods and (3) seeing their NSOE as one of the main resources to practise and improve their English, chiefly because of the absence of native English students in the pre-sessional course. Nonetheless, the participants were less concerned about the nationality of their lecturers after joining their MA programmes, due to their focus becoming more on subject-specific content.

In addressing the point of preferring NSOE, Lamb and Budiyanto (2013: 29-30) in their study on a group of young adolescent learners in provincial Indonesia reported that the teachers of these language learners viewed 'native speaker models as the prestigious professional variety, and learners picked up that message'. Moreover, the learners found 'difference exciting' (ibid: 30). Lamb and Budiyanto (ibid) further argue that as 'scarce commodities will find their own price' in the market economy, some private sector language institutions in the developing countries pay relatively high salaries to NSOE in order to attract them. Nonetheless, some other researchers (e.g. Holliday, 2005; Rivers, 2011) favoured non-native local teachers of English, mainly because of their knowledge of the learners' home context and language. In the present study, three participants (Fadi, Yazn and Zainab) were taught by both native and non-native teachers of English in private educational establishments. The three participants, in particular Fadi, expressed their satisfaction with the provision given by some of their Arab teachers of English, mainly due to the fact that these teachers were native-

like and many of them were Master's degree holders in English Language Teaching from British or American universities. This finding might enhance the argument that EFL teachers are in need of receiving pre-service training (preferably by NSOE) for the important task of teaching English to both primary school children and university students (Van-de-Hoven, 2014).

In effect, more empirical research seems to be necessary to explore the effectiveness of teacher training programmes as regards the performance of English teachers in the Arab world and students' attitudes and strategy use. It should be borne in mind that English teachers' teaching practices in this research largely mirrored the educational sector they worked in (i.e. private or public sector) along with the national policies followed in the Arab world as is also the case perhaps in other developing countries 'that have for years created divisions in terms of educational resources among rural and urban schools and non-key and key institutions' (Gao, 2008b: 183, see also Taylor, 2013a). This point will be further explained when discussing the effects of 'shadow education' on the participants' strategy use and identity development in the forthcoming section.

8.3.4.2.3 The Changing Role of Peers in the Participants' Strategic Language Learning Efforts

As explained in Section 8.3.2.1 of this Chapter, peers represented almost exclusively 'a trust network' (i.e. sharing confident information with others without taking a procedural action) for almost all participants, by engaging indirectly in their language learning in the form of checking homework given by their teachers and recommending each other for private supplementary tutoring, for instance. The participants (apart from Fadi and Zainab) perceived

the classroom environment in their homelands as teacher-directed and sometimes competitive (Mideros and Carter, 2014). With the exception of three participants (Fadi, Yazn and Zainab), the other participants were unfamiliar with cooperative learning prior to entering the UK.

This finding might be one of the main reasons that led most participants (and possibly the other Asian students attending the pre-session course) at the second research stage to downplay the value of the cooperative activities introduced by their tutors, considering their classmates' oral and written feedback as less useful (see Extracts F7, 66-68 and M8, 121-145 in Section 7.2.3.4 of Chapter 7). As Carson and Nelson (1996: 11-12) point out, students who are accustomed to teacher-dominated pedagogies often consider peer interactions less effective because the tutor is deemed to be the only source of knowledge that can be trusted. This finding concurs with that of Poverjuc et al. (2012), who investigated the perceptions of five international students regarding the usefulness of their peers' feedback on their academic writing while attending a one-year taught master's course at a major UK university.

Poverjuc et al. (2012: 465) found that most participants did not fully capitalise on the benefits of peer feedback practices, on the grounds that 'students' lack of prior peer feedback and their perception of peers' ability to provide valid feedback constituted potential barriers to the success of peer feedback'. As a result, one of the most fundamental tasks for teachers working with international students may be to pay special attention to 'a learner's disposition' (i.e. 'a pre-existing readiness for something'), by enlightening them to the potential of cooperative activities for their future, and how these activities can be implemented, especially at the early stages of attending a course (Littlejohn, 2008: 11). 'A learner's disposition' is

essential because an individual cannot be easily engaged in any activity without recognising its salience for their desired future self-images (Dörnyei and Kubanyiova, 2014:13-14). This point will be further examined in the forthcoming section when discussing the participants' personal sense of agency.

As the above discussion indicates, classmates in the second research stage played a neutral to constraining role in the participants' language learning and strategy use, on the grounds that the Chinese constituted the dominant group in the pre-sessional English course and were described by the participants as introverts and less competent English speakers (Xiong, 2005: 117-118).

It has been demonstrated in Sections 7.2.2.2 and 7.2.2.3 of Chapter 7 that all participants felt disillusioned because they expected to make meaningful contact with native speakers of English across different settings from the moment of their arrival in the UK. According to the participants, the superficial nature of their interactions with native English-speaking individuals stemmed more from institutional shortcomings than personal ones, due to the scarcity of British students living on campus and their total absence on the pre-sessional course (Allen, 2013; Coles and Swami, 2012; Trice, 2007) (see extracts N5, 112-114; R6, 88-91 and Z5, 34-41 in Section 7.2.2.2). This finding was in line with the argument raised by Ward et al. (2009: 80) that overseas students' opportunities to intensify their relationships with their host nationals pertain not only to the former's own motivation but also to 'the willingness of the receiving community to facilitate integration'. As a consequence, all participants at the second research stage built strong and purposeful relationships with co-nationals who shared their culture and language (i.e. Arab postgraduate students attending the pre-sessional course or those sharing their lodging and leisure time) (Montgomery, 2009:

456). They did so in order to buffer ‘feelings of loneliness, depression, and stress’ (Trice, 2007: 108).

As shown in Section 7.3.2.2 of Chapter 7, almost all participants after the start of their MA programmes developed their relationships with their peers, in particular with ‘a multinational network’ (i.e. non-Arab and non-native English-speaking individuals in this research) inside and outside the classroom. Although the findings of some empirical studies on the experiences of international students (e.g. Green, 2013; Montgomery, 2010) have suggested that the main purpose of a multinational network was ‘recreational’, the present study revealed the more active role of this social network in the participants’ processing of language learning and strategy use. More precisely, the participants’ peers, chiefly non-Arab international students, simultaneously formulated the trust and advice networks to most participants at the third research stage, through internalising their strategic language learning efforts at linguistic, academic and intercultural levels:

➤ *At a linguistic level:* This level appeared clearer with participants who were educated in the private sector in their homelands (Fadi, Yazn and Zainab). For example, Zainab’s Indian classmate was a valuable source of encouragement for her to compose some poems in English by herself. Yazn’s German classmate enabled him to improve his fluency in English and to learn some English idioms. Fadi’s European flatmates also helped him to improve his colloquial English.

➤ *At an academic level:* This level was the major concern of all participants. For example, the participants’ peers had a role in increasing their awareness concerning the potential of incorporating a host of technologies (Dropbox, Mendeley Desktop, Mindjet and SkyDrive) into their educational lives, mainly to save time and organise their academic work. Khaled, for example, used the Mendeley Desktop in his study to manage and store the

references of his written assignments in addition to annotating PDFs. Jamal and Zainab also approached their most able counterparts in order to learn how to make their academic papers more critical.

➤ *At an intercultural level:* The impacts of ‘international posture’ referring to an interest in intercultural friendship and international affairs along with openness to other cultures appeared clearer at the third research stage, in particular with Yazn and Fadi who were more extroverted than others (Kehrwald, 2013; Yashima, 2009, 2013). This finding might be attributed to the fact that English became a critical factor in the quality of intercultural experiences between the participants and their international counterparts more than with their British nationals (Benson et al, 2013: 90-93).

In line with the above discussion, some researchers who are interested in the area of study-abroad contexts (e.g. Green, 2013; Sovic, 2013; Trice, 2007) have claimed that universities that receive international students need to adopt certain strategies, so as to help international students meet both their linguistic and non-linguistic challenges, through, for example, developing accommodation and other spaces that enhance contact between local and international students, and developing ‘well-designed buddy systems that consider students’ micro-cultures such as age and interest’ (Green, 2013: 223).

In the present research study, Fadi had more meaningful contact with British people than all the other participants, chiefly due to the fact that the assessment methods of his MA programme were based on writing three assignments in accordance with the twenty cases that he diagnosed and treated during his work at hospital (see Extract F10, 88-123 of Chapter 7). Although this kind of assessment followed in his department played a pivotal role in increasing his real opportunities to communicate with both academic and less academic native-English speakers, Fadi also exercised his agentive power by taking advantage of these

‘enabling language resources’ (Palfreyman, 2014: 177). This point related to the impact of human agency on the participants’ learning motivations and strategy use in the UK will be further explained in the forthcoming section. In this sense, international students are also in need of capitalising on the opportunities offered to them by their host universities.

8.3.4.3 The Role of Human Agency in Regulating the Participants’ Strategy Use in the UK

As illustrated in Section 8.3.2.3 of this chapter, the contextual affordances (e.g. social agents, assessment modes, and material resources) had an *influential* rather than a *determining* influence on the participants’ strategic language learning efforts because ‘individuals should not be merely viewed as agents reactive to their contexts, but should also be viewed as proactive agents who are able to change them’ (Gkonou, 2015: 197). To exemplify this point further, the participants’ motivation to go abroad to complete their studies in the UK after graduation represented what Flowerdew and Miller (2008: 206) call ‘epiphanies- significant, turning-point moments in a subject’s life’. As a result, the participants, especially those educated in the public sector, reported adjustments in their LLS’ use by deploying more voluntary strategies (e.g. watching English TV programmes and approaching competent speakers of English to practise their English with), in response to their changing learning goals and conditions (for more elaboration of this point, see Section 8.3.1). Underpinned by activity theory, Lantolf and Thorne (2006: 143) therefore contend that agency is ‘about more than voluntary control over behavior’ in that it ‘entails the ability to assign relevance and significance to things and events’.

A recent volume edited by Deters, Gao, Miller and Vitanova (2015), ‘Theorizing and Analyzing Agency in Second Language Learning: Interdisciplinary Approaches’, has supported the idea of using sociocultural perspectives to capture ‘the complexity of learner agency’. These editors regard ‘the lack of a single definition of agency as inevitable’ (ibid: 6). Instead of conceiving agency as ‘an individual or autonomous phenomenon’ (Vitanova et al., 2015: 4), it is seen from sociocultural approaches ‘as being largely mediated from a range of settings surrounding the students, as well as from the temporal and spatial dimensions associated with those settings’ (Gkonou, 2015: 196-197). Therefore, this longitudinal, qualitative study has considered the effects of a host of contextual realities, along with the participants’ concerns, desires and visions as regards their strategy use and development across time and space. Related to this, Lantolf and Pavelenko (2001: 155) call for ‘a more complex view of second language learners as agents’. Based on the findings of the present study and on the need to consider learner agency from a holistic perspective, the following points seemed to exemplify this perspective:

8.3.4.3.1 The Intentionality and Dynamism Aspects of Learner Agency

All participants did not have one constant static degree of agency during their entire stay in the UK, but rather it was largely changing and adapting in accordance with their past language learning experiences, future-oriented goals and expectations (Mercer, 2012: 50; see also Fina, 2015: 272-273). To further exemplify this idea, the majority of participants (especially Jamal, Nasser and Rama) in the first two months of their stay in the UK exhibited a lower degree of agency at a linguistic level, largely due to their misconception that the availability of an English language environment would automatically enable them to improve their spoken English, without verbalising the language learning strategies that they intended

to deploy to achieve that goal (Dörnyei and Kubanyiova, 2014; Lamb, 2013a) (see Section 8.3.3 in this chapter). As a result, White (2008: 127) postulates that language learners' beliefs sometimes 'assist or constrain them in exercising their agency in particular contexts for language learning and use'. In line with this argument, Gkonou, (2015: 196) argues that there are two inseparable dimensions that compose agency: a desire and an ability to act (i.e. a sense of agency) to be followed by 'real action and participation (i.e. exercise of agency)'.

It may be argued that all participants in the third research stage were highly agentic, in particular at academic and intercultural levels, since the main reason for their coming to the UK was to obtain academic qualifications through the medium of English. Examples of the participants' exercise of their agency at the third research stage are approaching their most able counterparts in order to learn how to make their written assignments more critical (Jamal and Zainab), renting a room off-campus in order to live with native-English speakers (Fadi), watching British programmes with no subtitles (Fadi, Jamal, Khaled, Yazn and Zainab), increasing the use of technologies in their academic and personal lives such as Dropbox, Viber, Facebook, Mendeley Desktop, Mindjet and SkyDrive (all participants) (for more examples see Section 8.3.3). At the fourth research stage, the participants were highly to moderately agentic, essentially at an academic level through, for example in dealing with insecurities regarding collecting and analysing data, in addition to demonstrating effective time-management skills by starting work on their dissertation early and allowing sufficient time to revise their work (see Section 7.4.3 in Chapter 7). However, they mentioned that the difficulties that they underwent while writing their assignments in the first two terms of their postgraduate programmes helped them to improve these strategies.

The above discussion seems to align with Mercer's (2012: 56) argument that 'although there is an assumption that learners will wish to be as agentic as possible, this may not be the case

in every context and for every purpose'. For this reason, almost all participants were more agentic in terms of the academic aspect more than in the linguistic and intercultural aspects of their lives. For example, two participants (Nasser and Rama) sometimes gave up socialising with individuals in non-academic settings in the UK in order to finish their postgraduate assignments.

8.3.4.3.2 The Reflexivity Aspect of Learner Agency

According to Gao (2013b: 227), 'reflexive/reflective thinking or thinking during action and postevent in the learning process' can be seen as an important component of agency. This was made manifest in the present study through the participants' evaluation of the pre-sessional English course along with the MA programmes that they attended. To exemplify this point further, three participants (Fadi, Nasser and Rama) made a number of suggestions as regards overcoming the problem of the total absence of native-English students on the pre-sessional course, such as inviting some British postgraduate students to the class or through offering some chances to international students to visit British families on weekends. Three other participants (Khaled, Yazn and Zainab) also expressed their wish to discuss inside the classroom the English movies and programmes that they liked rather than the movies assigned by their English tutor and which were only available on BBC iPlayer (see Extracts Z8, 71-90 and R7, 54-77 in Section 7.2.3.3). Moreover, the majority of participants highlighted the importance of activating the role of their personal tutors in their postgraduate programmes, especially in relation to developing their critical thinking skills while writing the assignments. Three participants (Mouza, Nasser and Rama), for instance, declared that they did not meet their personal tutors during their MA programmes, chiefly due to their inadequate knowledge of the kinds of support that the tutors could offer.

As explained in Section 7.3.3.2 of Chapter 7, four participants (Khaled, Nasser, Yazn and Zainab) reflected on their negative experiences in relation to the reluctance of some British and European classmates to work with them in group work discussion inside the classroom. This was because the activity of team work in some modules was formally assessed, and a number of their British/European students deemed that working with non-European students might drag down their marks (see Extract Z11, 21-44 in Section 7.3.3.2). Based on this finding, it may be argued that seeking out opportunities to speak and interact with native speakers as one of the salient characteristics of ‘good language learners’ (Rubin, 1975: 45) is not confined to an individual’s will and knowledge of the importance of this learning strategy. The social networks surrounding that individual can also play a pivotal role in either consolidating or hampering others’ entry to their desired community (Gao, 2013b; Lee, 2014). As Kinginger (2004: 221) appositely puts it, ‘[A]ccess to language is shaped not only by learners’ own intentions, but also by those of the others with whom they interact’. With this in mind, Parks and Raymond (2004: 386) point out that ‘a social context is not merely a neutral container. Active involvement in a specific social context may be essential in helping the individual become aware of his or her needs, and may constrain or facilitate the use of various strategies’. In this respect, the participants (apart from Fadi) had stronger bonds with their international counterparts than with British nationals, which in turn bolstered their ‘international posture’ i.e. openness to other cultures (Yashima, 2009, 2013).

According to Gkonou (2015: 196), language learners’ ‘refusal to act or participate in specific contexts for specific reasons’ is also indicative of their exercise of agency. Coming to the present study, the participants’ positive reaction to the writing strategies mediated by their English tutors while writing a micro research project (e.g. finding resources, finding resources, following referencing conventions and avoiding plagiarism) at the second research stage, and thus giving a less central position to the other activities introduced inside the

classroom might suggest the participants' agentic power (for more elaboration of this point, see Section 8.3.3 in this Chapter). In investigating how the participants in this particular research exercised their agency in their selection and use of strategies, the above discussion affirms that the dynamic interplay between contextual realities and agency initiated their strategy use and self-images, and the concept of agency 'cannot be seen as operating only on individual intensions, but always represents a point of intersection between habitus, iterative practices, and personal invention and volition' (Fina, 2015: 275).

8.4 Ideas for Further Discussion

In this section, I critically discussed some ideas that influenced the participants' strategy choice and use, along with their learning motivations and identity development.

8.4.1 Impacts of 'Shadow Education' on Language Learning Strategy Use and Identity Construction

In answering the research questions of this study, it has been demonstrated that the participants' strategic language learning efforts during their time in the UK appeared to be affected by their previous language learning experiences in their homelands (Benson et al., 2013; Gao, 2013a). This notion aligns with the essential assumptions of sociocultural language learning perspectives, which emphasise that language learners' strategy use and self-image are shaped by their 'unique history' (i.e. looking not only at the present but at past causes and expected outcomes) and 'mediated by artefacts and social interactions'

(Palfryman, 2014: 181, see also Gillette 1994; Lantolf and Pavlenko, 2001). In addressing this point, Mercer (2011), mentions that

Language learners do not come to the encounter as a psychologically blank sheet of paper but they bring with them their beliefs about themselves and their attitudes towards the foreign language, and these both impact on and in turn are influenced by the experience (Mercer, 2011: 2).

In this research, the concept of ‘shadow education’ seemed to disclose the dialectic between the participants’ historical backgrounds, personal agency and social affordances, along with its contribution in internalising their strategy use, future goals and identity formation. The metaphor ‘shadow education’ was first suggested by Marimuthu et al. (1991) to stand for ‘tutoring in academic subjects that is provided for a fee and that takes place outside standard school hours’ (Bray and Lykins, 2012: 1; for a comprehensive review of shadow education, see Bray and Kwo, 2014; Kassotakis and Verdis, 2013). Referring to the practice of private instruction in Malaysia, Marimuthu et al. (1991) argued that

The study...found that a considerable percentage of youths attended private tuition [in Malaysia] in order to prepare themselves for the selective national examinations...the practice of private tuition was so prevalent that it could be considered as a ‘shadow educational system’ (Marimuthu et al., 1991: vi) .

According to Chan and Bray (2014: 363-364), shadow education is most visible in East Asia (e.g. China, Korea and Japan), and is seen as the result of neoliberalism which calls for privatisation in the education sector. Chan and Bray (ibid) further indicate that different kinds of shadow education can be recognised such as one-to-one provision, online tutoring, small groups and professional tutorial centres used to advance academic performance in terms of both achievement and attainment. It is not concerned with non-academic lessons such as music or athletics (ibid). Ngai et al. (2013: 38-39) have questioned the viability of most kinds

of ‘shadow education’, suggesting that they largely stress scoring in examinations for better careers and higher future income. In Egypt, for example, Sobhy (2012: 49) highlighted a survey suggesting that 81% of households had children who enrolled in private supplementary tutoring in almost all subjects in the secondary stage. This in turn led a great number of these students to cease attending school because of their reliance on tutoring (ibid: 47).

Hartmann (2008: 7) in turn notes that the phenomenon of ‘shadow education’ can be described as ‘an informal market of education’, in the sense that education represents ‘a commodity’ and its quality varies in accordance with the financial situations of the children’s families. For example, in Hong Kong where both English and Chinese are official languages, Morris and Adamson (2010: 147-148) claim that many parents prefer to send their children to tuition-charging private educational settings in which English is the medium of instruction. Likewise, Tucker (2014: 181) describes the increasing interest in the Arab Gulf region in attending fee-paying private schools because the school curriculum is taught in English. Based on this, Coniam (2014: 105) postulates that ‘English as a subject in the shadow education system has received comparatively little attention in the research literature’. Coniam (ibid) adds that the term ‘shadow education’ is no longer confined to out-of-school settings, but can also encompass the tuition-charging private formal settings where English is both the content and medium of instruction. In this respect, Bray and Lykins (2012: 1) underscore the potential of clarifying the use of the construct ‘shadow education’ in empirical studies, simply because ‘it is not always employed with consistent meaning’.

In the present research, the term ‘shadow education’ is used to refer to tutoring in English that is provided for a fee and that occurs both inside and outside of formal classroom settings for different purposes. Note that the present study is the first empirical study in the LLS field that

has examined the important role that ‘shadow education’ could play in scaffolding a group of postgraduate Arab learners’ strategy use and their identity development across different settings. This might be partially ascribed to the fact that most published writings have merely focused on the advantages and disadvantages of after-school private supplementary tutoring on a country’s economic success.

The findings of the present study suggest that the participants experienced diverse forms of ‘shadow education’ during their stay in their homelands, and that these experiences were often mediated by ‘significant others’ (e.g. parents and friends). In the Arab world, almost all public schools use Arabic as the medium of instruction and English language is taught as a separate subject (Al-Thubaiti, 2014: 163). The five participants who were educated in public schools received financial support from their immediate family members at a late stage of their education to aid their success in English examinations as a prerequisite for progressing onto their future studies. The families did that through helping these participants hire a native-English-speaking tutor for an IELTS exam (Khaled, Jamal and Mouza), receiving online English tutoring services for an IELTS exam (Mouza) and enrolling in private English institutions for TOEFL exam preparation (Rama) or for academic success at university (Khaled, Nasser and Jamal). Based on this, the prevention aspect of instrumentality associated with the ought-to L2 self dominated these five participants’ motivational discourses before their arrival in the UK (Ushioda, 2014).

As already mentioned, the participants’ ‘instrumental-preventative’ motivation was interwoven with their interim short-term objectives, which in turn contributed to making them deploy heavily exam-oriented strategies such as visual repetition for the new words and work on simulation exam papers. However, the five participants highly valued the potential of private supplementary tutoring because it served to compensate for their dissatisfaction

with the English teaching methods received in state-funded public schools, and also to improve their proficiency levels, which ‘were translated into grades and test scores’ (i.e., ‘for pragmatic reasons rather than pleasure’) (Besser and Chik, 2014: 306). In this way, ‘their limited L2 identity development can be attributed to contextual uncertainties’ (ibid).

The other three participants (Fadi, Yazn and Zainab) experienced a different kind of ‘shadow education’; namely, attending private schools that charged fees to tailor their services to the clients’ needs (Bray and Lykins, 2012: 10). Based on this, ‘private tutoring may supplant rather than supplement mainstream instruction’ (Lykins, 2014: 4). As discussed in Chapter 6, Fadi and Zainab were sent by their highly educated and well-off families to outstanding private schools, which used English as the content and medium of instruction for many taught subjects. However, Yazn received education at a private school of poorer quality, in that the focus was more on scientific subjects. Therefore, Bray (2014: 385) postulates that parents’ expenditure on their children’s language improvement needs to be accompanied by a choice the kind and quality of the formal educational setting that would enable their children to obtain access to more language input and exposure.

According to Besser and Chik (2014: 306), students who enrol in private schools often have ‘exposure not only to academics in English, but also access to teachers and peers who serve as role models for cosmopolitans’. ‘Cosmopolitans’ is a term borrowed from Hannerz (2004) to describe individuals who negotiate ‘a L2 identity in English language and culture alongside their L1 identity’ (Besser and Chik, ibid). In answering the second research question, it has been shown that English for these three participants represented more than a subject on the school curriculum. Since the early stages of their English learning, they exhibited in some instances their self-determination to connect with the international English-speaking community or what Yashima (2009, 2013) has termed an ‘international posture’, a

construct used with particular reference to Japanese learners of English (for more elaboration about this construct, see Section 8.2.2). This tendency was partially scaffolded by the educational practices of the three participants' private schools (especially those of Fadi and Zainab), which employed competent/native speakers of English, and attempted to create opportunities for language learners to 'speak as themselves' (Ushioda, 2011b: 21, for more elaboration as regards this point, see Sections 8.3.2 and 8.3.3 in this chapter).

Furthermore, these participants espoused a variety of learning strategies in their homelands, and some of these strategies were essentially internalised within themselves to master English, and occurred beyond the immediate utilitarian purpose. Examples of these strategies are borrowing English novels from the school library to read in summer (Zainab), hanging a large map of Britain on the wall to get to know more about its geography (Fadi) and preferring to watch English cartoons or movies (Yazn) (for more examples, see Table 14 in Chapter 6). In such examples, the participants were more involved with English for personal reasons and pleasure. With this in mind, enrolling in private schools where English was emphasised constituted a major form of 'shadow education', and played a pivotal role in enhancing some participants' identity formation as English users (Lamb and Budiyanto, 2013). In this respect, 'educational policy, cultural values, and distribution of resources may impact on young learners in similar contexts' (Besser and Chik, 2014: 308).

The above discussion underlines the inaccuracy of making generalisations about the learning characteristics of national populations (Lamb, 2012: 1016). For example, many researchers (e.g. Ahmed, 2011; Alabbad and Gitsaki, 2011; Farhat, 2012) uphold the idea that English in the Arab world is taught as a foreign language, and that it is hard if not impossible for Arabs to negotiate their identities as English users in their homelands. In this study, however, it seemed possible to argue that the participants who were educated in private schools had more

agentive opportunities for identity development than those who attended state-funded public schools. The national policies followed in the Arab world, as is the case perhaps in other developing countries, ‘created divisions in terms of educational resources among rural and urban schools and non-key and key institutions’ (Gao, 2008b: 183, see also Taylor, 2013a). Nonetheless, the findings of this study in relation to the notion of ‘shadow education’ are difficult to generalise because of the limited number of participants.

As explained in Chapter 7, the participants in this research could be seen as ‘good language learners’ (GLLs), on the grounds that all of them succeeded in accomplishing the main goal of their coming to the UK; namely, attaining academic qualifications through the medium of English (for further details about the GLL concept, see Section 2.2.1 in Chapter 2). However, the linguistic adjustments of three participants (Fadi, Yazn and Zainab) to the new context appeared to be easier than that of the other participants who were educated in public settings in their homelands (Benson et al, 2013; Jackson, 2008; Kinginger, 2004). That is, their prior language learning experiences helped them ‘build a positive linguistic self-concept’ in the UK (Benson et al., 2013: 151). For example, Fadi and Zainab reported that they were confident in using English in the UK, although they were sometimes linguistically hindered by some local expressions uttered by the British, in particular those of the less educated. Conversely, Nasser and Rama declared that the miscommunication and misunderstandings that they experienced with other people in the UK could be partially ascribed to their inadequate level of English proficiency. For this reason, Benson et al (2013) point out that

To increase the benefit of study abroad, students need to understand their past. They need the chance, before departure, to examine their past second language learning, to develop realistic goals and the opportunity to prepare for the realities of their study abroad programme (Benson et al, 2013: 152).

8.4.2 Dynamic Assessment and Fairness

In the light of the findings from the last research stage reported in Chapter 7, the inquiry revealed that the participants received varying degrees of support from their dissertation supervisors while writing a dissertation in English as part of their master's studies (see Section 7.4.2). This finding in turn raises some complex questions that have not been directly addressed in previous research on language learning – questions such as ‘could the dissertation supervisors’ unequal provision of mediation to the participants under investigation be seen as unfair treatment?’ and ‘what were the influences of such behaviours on the participants’ strategy use and their self-images?’. In effect, the dissertation supervisors in the current research study seemed to embrace what is called ‘dynamic assessment’ (Henceforth, DA), underpinned by sociocultural perspectives on language learning (Hessamy and Ghaderi, 2014; Lantolf and Poehner, 2004, 2013).

According to Lantolf and Poehner (2013), the conceptualisation of fairness in assessment is reframed in DA because it, unlike the conventional assessments, goes beyond helping language learners improve their test scores to include

performance that is undertaken collaboratively with the assessor, often referred to as a mediator. The kind and amount of support individuals require, as well as their responsiveness during interaction, enriches assessments by identifying both the underlying causes of poor performance and how near individuals are to successful independent functioning. (Lantolf and Poehner, 2013: 147)

In this sense, the amount and type of input offered by the dissertation supervisors to my participants appeared to be determined through their cognitive abilities and affective situations in addition to their awareness of the fact that the supervisor's role in dissertation-writing research is ‘collegial rather than authoritarian, and skills of hypothesising and speculating are highly valued’ (Paltridge and Woodrow, 2012: 90; see also Montgomery,

2010). For example, two participants (Jamal and Rama) received more academic and non-academic support from their supervisors who seemed to sympathise with these participants' sorrows and worries over their families back home due to the political turmoil taking place in their homelands (see extracts R14, 59-67 and J13, 43-51 in Section 7.4.2.1 of Chapter 7).

Concerning the quality of mediation in DA, Lantolf and Poehner (2013: 149) argue that an implicit form of mediation is preferable to present in the first place, since the defining feature of DA in language learning is to pinpoint the minimum level of support that learners need in order to take responsibility for accomplishing their intended learning goals successfully. As reported in the findings of the current study, the majority of dissertation supervisors tended to orchestrate the participants' learning efforts implicitly through, for example, helping them narrow down the focus of the research topic chosen by the participants themselves along with giving these participants constructive feedback and flexible suggestions in relation to the choice of appropriate methods for their study and ways of approaching potential participants. As mediation became more implicit, the supervisors as 'enabling social resources' played a remarkable role in bolstering the participants' growing sense of agency.

In keeping with the view which links the 'construction' of ideal language selves to the exercise of agency (Dörnyei and Kubanyiova, 2014: 36; Malcolm, 2011: 198), all the participants in response to the new assessment method used in the last research stage generated a developed version of their future visions of the 'ideal L2 self' which replicated their individual and national interest, as elucidated in the discussion of the third research question (Islam et al., 2013). For example, Zainab, the Iraqi participant, divulged that she would attempt to publish some parts of her master's dissertation in an Iraqi scientific magazine because she deemed that her research topic about the role of stakeholders in managing the healthcare projects in Iraq would have a direct effect on Iraqis' lives and the

economy of her country. This new vision of the participants' ideal language selves also led them to take up a particular set of LLSs while working on their assignments. Most of these strategies were more internalised within themselves and less directed by external factors i.e., the dominant use of voluntary strategies over the other-imposed strategies- strategies such as watching YouTube videos related to SPSS for data analysis, drawing a mindmap for each chapter that summed up the main points, and setting a deadline by themselves to complete each chapter of their dissertations.

The above discussion suggests that the changing mode of assessment in that research stage appeared to be conceived as one of the potential contextual realities that had a tremendous impact on the participants' strategy use and their self-image construction. Lantolf and Poehner (2013: 154) proclaim that DA does not constitute a threat to the validity and fairness of assessment, given that 'one cannot assume that all individuals will require the same quality and quantity or even that a given individual will require similar mediation at different points in time'. It should be borne in mind that the present research does not want to be seen as problematizing particular types of assessment methods, given that the aim of the current in-depth, longitudinal study is to project a group of Arab university learners' language learning experiences at an English-medium university in the UK, with a special focus on their shifting use of LLSs over time and in response to events.

8.4.3 Application of Technologies as Mediating Material Artefacts

As explained in Section 2.5.1.2 of Chapter 2, language learning from a sociocultural stance is a mediated activity, and language learners are thought of as being 'human-entities-acting-with-mediational-means' because they are likely to be in constant dynamic interplay with

each other, utilising a multitude of material tools such as books or computers to gain a foothold in their desired communities (Lantolf, 2013: 19; see also Benson and Cooker, 2013b). In a review of Bailey' and Damerow's (2014) book 'Teaching and Learning English in the Arabic-Speaking World', Tucker (2014: 181) has identified a number of 'relatively neglected areas' in language learning research. One of these areas pertains to the lack of examining the role of technologies in internalising students' language learning development in the Arab world from students' viewpoints, in spite of the ubiquitousness of technologies over the past decade (ibid). As a result, the present study has to some extent answered Tucker's (2014) call.

Lai et al. (2014: 2) underline the importance of technology-enhanced language learning in bridging the gaps between formal and informal settings, especially in 'instructional contexts where in-class instruction focuses predominately on one aspect of language learning (e.g. language forms)'. Elsewhere, Lai (2014: 2) argues that there has recently been a burgeoning of research studies that investigate the use of technologies in 'the less charted terrain of language learning beyond the classroom'. According to her, most of these studies (e.g. Benson and Reinders, 2011; Chik, 2014; Murray, 2008; Wang, 2012) found that GLLs were more likely to make use of a broad array of technological resources available to them beyond the classroom (e.g., music, TV shows, the Internet and online chatting/forums), and that this was positively associated with their 'learning outcomes, confidence and enjoyment' (ibid).

Wang's (2012: 339) study, for example, explained how a group of Chinese students of English had overcome their difficulty of being 'deaf-and-dumb' English learners (i.e., having poor listening and speaking skills) by adopting the strategy of immersing themselves regularly and rigorously in English television drama at home in China. Based on the findings of her study, Wang (2012: 340) suggested that the significance of watching movies rich in

authentic and functional use of the target language was not limited to the advantage of pinpointing some specific linguistic facets that these students might still have needed to improve, such as pronunciation and intonation. This extended to being a mediating and enabling artefact for ‘an in-depth understanding of western social values, which will empower them [language learners] to become world citizens’ (ibid, 339). By the same token, Murray (2008: 14-15) recorded the language learning experiences of a few successful adult Japanese EFL learners, and found that they achieved intermediate to advanced levels of fluency through their engagement outside the classroom with technological tools related to American pop culture such as movies, TV programmes and music.

In the present study (Section 6.4.3 of Chapter 6), however, it has been demonstrated that although the extent of technology-mediated language resources deployed by the participants in their homelands varied, such as videogames, mobile phones and the media (i.e. TV, films, music and the Internet), none gave the impression that their use of technologies had been systematic or extensive, in that they used technologies in limited ways in informal settings, basically for entertainment purposes, throughout their schooling but that this evolved into managing their goal commitment after entering university and/or during the preparation for TOEFL/IELTS to complete their higher studies in the UK (Lai and Gu, 2011; Lamb, 2013a). This finding resonates somewhat with the claim made by Lai et al. (2014: 21) that ‘being able to exert agency to construct one’s out-of-class learning experiences does not necessarily mean that these experiences are beneficial’.

To clarify this point, one of the findings of Lai’ and Gu’s (2011: 329) study on Hong Kong university students’ use of technology outside the classroom to regulate their language learning was related to a mismatch between the language proficiency levels of the majority of their participants and the online authentic materials they used. For instance, some participants

in their study found it difficult to understand the reading materials on online websites or in Facebook, since they were at the beginning proficiency level (ibid). As a result, Lai and Gu (2011: 329-330) highlighted the critical role that their English teachers could play in enriching the awareness of these students to the existence of authentic material engagement tools, such as web annotation tools (e.g., WordChamp and WebNotes) and speech rate adjusters. Likewise, the participants who came from the Arab Gulf States (Khaled, Nasser and Mouza) mentioned (in extracts M4, 22-41 and N2, 66-75 in Section 6.4.3 of Chapter 6) that although they had access to a great many electronic English resources from the library catalogue in their university, they had not recognised the viability of these resources before coming to the UK. The same applied to smart phones although some participants (Jamal, Yazn and Zainab) expressed their high degree of enthusiasm for this technology.

In this respect, Lai (2014: 16) affirms that language learners, mostly non-advanced ones, apparently need some guidance from more experienced others such as English teachers to bridge students' language learning experiences in out-of-class and in-class settings, by integrating into their instruction a multitude of technological affordances that could potentially be utilised by the learners outside the classroom and/or give assignments that involve the use of these resources outside the classroom. Palfreyman's (2012) exploration in mobile technology (students' own camera phones) conducted at Zayed University in Dubai may be treated as an excellent example of finding ways of supplementing learners' school-based language learning with the affordances related to their daily lives (for more elaboration of Palfreyman's (2012) study, see Section 8.3.2.1). By raising language awareness of the diversity and quality of technology-mediated learning artefacts, this could lead to fostering 'learners' positive beliefs and mindsets to enhance their intent to act on the resources/venues' (Lai, 2014: 16), along with enabling them to formulate their desired possible self-image. Yashima (2013) shrewdly exemplifies this point and states that

If classroom engagement is tied to the outside world, where learners can be guided to see their possible selves in ways that will help expand their life opportunities and career options, the knowledge and skills they have acquired in schools can be situated in their imagined communities and thus English might retain its meaningfulness through their lives (Yashima, 2013: 50)

The participants' critical comments about the lack of the introducing of technologies inside the English classroom are indicative of exercising their agency revealed in their reflexive and reflective thinking (Gao, 2013b; Mercer, 2012). In the participants' accounts of past language learning experiences, most of them blamed their university teachers in their homelands for not incorporating technological tools inside the classroom, in spite of their availability. They did so after seeing the implementation of more technologies in academic settings in the UK. This finding would attest to the claim raised by Fullan (2013: 37-38) that teachers who have got used to and feel comfortable with what may seem to others as traditional and out-dated ways of teaching would conceive innovation as a disruptive and unwanted annoyance. Lack of support, lack of preparation during teacher training, and lack of time and heavy workload could also be seen as other factors that limit the use of technologies inside the classroom (ibid).

This finding was evidently echoed by Van-de-hoven (2014: 66-67), who talked about the growth of education provision in the oil-rich Arab Gulf States, principally Qatar and Emirates, through the dissemination of the latest technologies at universities and colleges and through the use of English as a medium of instructions to teach many content courses in higher education, with the purpose of preparing students for meaningful 21st century lives. Van-de-hoven (2014: 68) goes further and states that these ubiquitous technological resources are likely not to be sufficiently integrated inside classes by 'expatriate English teachers, who were predominately native Arabic speakers... [and] those English teachers were often inadequately trained and worked on short-term contracts'. With this in mind, organising

training sessions for Arab teachers of English by experts seems to be essential in enhancing their perceptions of the importance and benefits of technology for learning and teaching English.

Complicating the picture further is the role of a political factor in the participants' use of technology for language learning. For instance, the four participants who came from Iraq, Libya and Syria (Fadi, Jamal, Rama, Zainab) reported that some popular social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, Skype and YouTube) were blocked during most of their lives in their home countries, in addition to the slowness of the internet connectivity speed. Accordingly, their opportunities to profit from using some technologies outside the classroom to improve their English might appear to be curtailed in their homelands. This finding seemingly recalls Lai' and Gu's (2011: 319) argument that 'learners' out-of-class learning activities are subject to the impact of their social/political contexts and their personal attitudes and situations'.

8.5 Conclusion

This chapter has revealed the dynamism of the eight participants' strategy use and learning motivations, along with their private visions of their future possible selves, resulting from an unceasing interplay between learner agency and the mediation of contextual resources. Each participant prioritised and reprioritised various concerns, desires, and visions throughout their stay in the UK, until they identified the ultimate ones which seemed to be more pertinent to individual and national levels i.e. finding a good job and benefiting their own native country and fellow citizens (for more explanation concerning the construct of 'National Interest', see Section 8.3.3. in this Chapter). The findings also supported the argument that the participants, especially Fadi and Yazn, who succeeded in creating and sustaining a supportive social

learning space for their linguistic and non-linguistic goals were likely to be more satisfied with their learning experiences in the UK. This chapter has also critically discussed the mediating role of ‘shadow education’, technology-mediated language learning resources and different assessment methods on the participants’ strategy use and identity development.

CHAPTER 9 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Introduction

The present study has investigated the relationship between the language learning strategy use of Arab learners of English and their changing learning contexts, taking into consideration the increasing numbers of Arab university students studying abroad and the shifting paradigms of LLS research. This chapter will discuss the implications of this study for pedagogy and research, outline the advantages and limitations of the study, and provide suggestions for further LLS research using sociocultural perspectives.

9.2 Strengths and Limitations of The Study in terms of Methodology

As noted in Chapter 2, a substantial body of LLS research has been conducted quantitatively, using strategy survey tools. However, a qualitative approach was adopted in this study, in order to enter into the lifeworld of the eight participants and to capture their everyday situated language learning practices. It represents the first longitudinal, qualitative study in the LLS field that has attempted to generate a contextualised and dynamic understanding of the language learning strategies shown by a group of Arab postgraduate learners during their overseas sojourn. Individual in-depth interviews were used as the main method of data collection.

The study makes a number of methodological contributions to the field of study in question. First, it adopted phenomenography as a methodological framework, as justified in Chapter 3. Unlike phenomenology, which seeks to discover the singular essence of a phenomenon (the

what-aspect) through focusing on the most invariant meaning that all of the research participants have about a certain phenomenon, phenomenography lays bare the process of how a particular group of individuals discern, understand and experience the given phenomenon in the lived world (the how-aspect) (Angell, 2011: 19). Based on this, it was considered that phenomenology was justifiable insofar as the researcher sought to identify the effective LLSs deployed by all participants of his/her study. However, the aims of the present study were more complicated because I sought to disentangle how the phenomenon of using LLSs in an English-medium university abroad could have been conceived of differently by different participants, and sometimes by the same participant, in response to their changing goals, past language learning experiences and contextual realities.

A further innovative aspect of the research was that strong personal relationships were constructed between the participants and myself, essentially due to the long-term nature of this longitudinal study, together with the fact that my participants and I came from Arab backgrounds. Nonetheless, I continually sought to verify their experiential language learning accounts with fresh eyes, throughout the process of collecting and analysing data. I did this by checking during the interviews the participants' answers obtained from the previous interviews by asking them, for example, to compare between their teachers' teaching practices in their homelands and those in the pre-sessional course or in their postgraduate programmes. I also cross-referenced their verbal accounts with the data obtained from the other supplementary qualitative methods such as learner diaries and written narrative. Moreover, the participants sometimes made a comparison between their previous and ongoing learning experiences by themselves, without being asked to do so.

Despite the usefulness of the selected methodology, however, many interesting findings in my qualitative data have not been presented in the present study, principally because of space

limitations along with being less directly relevant to the LLS research. Therefore, I hope to revisit these data in the future, and to discuss certain aspects that were not sufficiently explained in the present study. One of these aspects pertains to Arab students' psychological adjustments to Britain by examining in detail the changes they expect to face in terms of practising their religious rituals, food habits, weather and even transport services.

As discussed in Section 2.3.1 of Chapter 3, LLS research has faced a barrage of criticism, principally due to the questionable results obtained from the use of task-free strategy questionnaires (Dörnyei, 2005; LoCastro, 1994). This kind of questionnaire tends to depict merely learners' expressed strategy preferences, and often paints a decontextualized, static picture of learners' strategy use (ibid). Nonetheless, some LLS researchers (Gao et al, 2013; Griffiths and Oxford, 2014) suggest that the combined use of semi-structured interviews and an open-ended questionnaire that fits local research contexts is essential to explore correlations between language learners' reported strategy use and their metacognitive beliefs about LLSs in a specific context, along with capturing the mediating role of contextual realities in either enabling or disabling the learners' LLS use and identity construction and development. With this in mind, the use of a combination of survey and interviews in further LLS research underpinned by socio-cultural perspectives on language learning (e.g. Benson and Cooker, 2013b) could enrich the data base available.

Finally, the rigour of this research was already described in Chapter 3, Section 3.6. I used the following criteria to enhance the validity of this research:

- **Communicative validity:** The decision to use qualitative methods in this research was based on a thorough review of the literature pertaining to the field of LLS research, which has demonstrated the unviability of using quantitative methods to capture the dynamic and complex nature of the construct of LLS. I also consulted my PhD supervisor and

other prominent experts in the LLS field during my participations in certain conferences about this issue. Moreover, the participants' feedback and suggestions were taken into account throughout the process of collecting and analysing data. For example, as the interviews were originally conducted in Arabic, I first asked another researcher who came from an Arab background to translate the selected interview transcripts into English. After this, I sent these selected transcripts to my participants to be checked.

- **Pragmatic Validity:** As the complexity of the participants' perceptions of the same phenomenon (i.e. the participants' changing use of LLSs in their homelands and the UK) was revealed, university students from the Arab world (and possibly from Asian countries) might be encouraged to reflect on how they learn English. These students can also attain a wider perspective on understanding why international students seek to study abroad, how this impacts on them, how previous language learning experiences might influence their current strategy use and learning goals and how they manage the difficult tasks they face, especially in terms of their learning to operate confidently in a language which is not their own. Additionally, this study offers some insights to the stakeholders and English teachers in the Arab world about the strategies that may be introduced to Arab students to develop their L2 identities and formulate realistic language learning goals. Moreover, this research may encourage and help Higher Education Institutions to revise their attitudes and practices in relation to supporting international students, especially in the support they offer to the development of competence in academic English. The practical implications of the findings of this study will be discussed in the next section.

As regards the reliability of this research, the following reliability checks were adopted:

- Dialogic reliability check: almost every step of my data analysis was discussed with my PhD supervisor and with some colleagues.
- Coder Reliability Check: one coder helped me to code the data of this study (see Chapter 5).
- Reliability as the researcher's interpretative awareness: different approaches and techniques were tried out before adopting 'a hybrid of inductive and deductive coding' and using Nvivo10 for data analysis (for more details about the process of data analysis followed in this study, see Chapter 5). Additionally, the context of the research, the background of the researcher and the characteristics of participants involved as well as the philosophical, theoretical and methodological underpinnings of the research were adequately described, in order to help the reader ascertain for which context the research findings might be applicable.

9.3 Implications for L2 Pedagogical Practices in the Arab World

One of the key findings of this research was that the participants' LLS use was always goal-oriented, and their language learning goals and L2 identity construction were largely influenced by the 'the quality and level of interpersonal support provided in the social learning environment' (Ushioda, 2008: 28) (see Section 8.3.1). The findings of this research, as discussed in Sections 8.3.1 and 8.3.2, were not completely consistent with the claim suggested by many language researchers (e.g. Block, 2007; Lamb and Budiyanto, 2013; Ryan and Dörnyei, 2013) that pre-university students engaging in the process of foreign language learning are likely to be unable to recognise the primacy of learning the target language in their lives, or even to identify realistic language learning goals. This study showed that language learners in EFL contexts might be able to do so if their awareness of English had

been properly nurtured at school and home. With this in mind, and based on the findings of this study, I suggest the following practical steps to be enhanced in academic and/or non-academic settings in the Arab world (and perhaps in some Asian countries).

9.3.1 Using ‘Near Peer Role Models’ as a Motivational Strategy

English teachers in the Arab world may present the motivational strategy of ‘near peer role models’ (NPRMs) in their classrooms. NPRMs represent ‘peers who are close to our social, professional and/or age level who for some reason we may respect and admire’ (Murphey, 1998: 201; see also Murphey et al, 2014). Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014: 63) suggest that NPRMs can contribute to raising L2 learners’ hopes for the future and motivating them to ‘pursue similar excellence’. This is principally based on the argument that NPRMs would have similarities (e.g. of gender, ethnicity, interests, age level or social background) with learners, who may in turn attempt to interact and/or emulate their nearest role model’s ways to success (ibid). By doing this, they can generate a possible future image for themselves (ibid). Therefore, Dörnyei and Murphey (2003: 128) consider NPRMs as ‘one of the most powerful ways of teaching’. In this sense, it may be argued that students’ siblings or outstanding ‘proximal others’ from their academic institutions/immediate social context can be regarded as positive role models for them (Murphey and Arao, 2001: 3).

Gao (2013a: 179), for instance, explained how Zhang Haidi as a disabled language learner ‘was promoted nationwide by Chinese government as a role model’ for a huge number of Chinese language learners because she achieved a soaring success in learning English despite her physical predicament. Gao (2013a: 182) claimed that Zhang invested and sustained her language learning efforts, relying mainly on the help of a close friend who was an expert

English teacher and who aided her to realise the new vision of ‘ideal self’ as a language user and a ‘useful’ member of her society. In the present research study, Zainab, for example, repeatedly mentioned that her eldest brother, a holder of a Diploma in English literature, was her own role model in relation to reading and even composing poems in English. Fadi, the Syrian participant, also verbalised that his uncle’s children living in the UK boosted his aspiration for learning English and choosing the UK to pursue his postgraduate studies. However, the value of introducing a near peer role modelling approach to students ‘in a way that is compelling in a particular socio-cultural setting, and engages the identity of learners’ has not been sufficiently advocated in contexts in which English is taught as additional language (White, 2008: 126). This was clearly evident in the findings reported in the present study.

In response to this point, Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014: 64) suggest that English teachers need to espouse certain strategies in their language classrooms in order to increase their language learners’ awareness of the motivational power of NPRMs. For example, English teachers can invite successful L2 learners to the class from the same school, region or city to share their experiences and success stories, and may use the experiences of these successful learners as teaching materials (*ibid*). Teachers may also share their own language learning experiences of success. Moreover, they possibly ‘create a platform for sharing students’ successful language learning strategies and experiences’, e.g. classroom displays, classroom online blogs and newsletters (i.e. a selection of inspiring extracts from the students’ language learning histories). In effect, the near peer role modelling approach appears to be context-sensitive and more effective than teaching L2 learners a single list of strategies possibly possessed by a number of ‘good language learners’ in other learning contexts and developed by some researchers such as Rubin (1975) and Stern (1975) (for more elaboration of this point, see Section 2.2.1 in Chapter 2). This is because teaching students a decontextualised

set of LLSs is likely to disparage their individual variation and human agency (Lee and Oxford, 2008: 306).

9.3.2 Fostering ‘International Posture’ and ‘National Interest’ among L2 Learners

It has been demonstrated that before coming to the UK, the participants (apart from Fadi and Zainab) showed a low degree of ‘international posture’ (i.e. an interest in intercultural friendship and international affairs along with openness to other cultures) and ‘national interest’ (i.e. an interest in projecting a positive group/national image in the international arena), in spite of the fact that the intercultural and national interests are likely to be associated with the promotion aspect of instrumentality (i.e. aspiration towards a desired end state) related to long-term learning goals. Nonetheless, these interests acted as strong motivators in regulating and shaping the participants’ strategy use and self-images at the third and fourth stages of this research. More precisely, English operated as a means for the students to achieve their ultimate vision of finding a respectable job in the future and participating in the progress of their own country along with helping their fellow citizens.

Related to this, none of the participants mentioned that English would constitute a threat to their ‘adherence to Islamic duties’ or ‘national identity as Arabs’. Indeed, this finding was inconsistent with the claim advanced by a number of researchers (e.g. Al-Issa and Dahan, 2011; Karmani, 2005, 2010; Troudi and Jendli, 2011), namely that learning more English could cause a weakening of Arabic, which is the language of the Quran (Van-den-hoven, 2014: 67-68). For example, Troudi and Jendli (2011: 41) argue that ‘the constant onslaught of

English and its potential disastrous effects on Arabic as a language and a cultural symbol' is a cause for great consternation.

With this in mind, home-school liaisons in the Arab world need to be strengthened, with the aim of raising Arab students' awareness of the importance of English for the healthy reputation of their countries in the international arena, and for helping them feel 'modern' and 'international' in response to the spread of English as an international language in the contemporary globalised world (Pan and Block, 2011: 396). Schools, for example, can become platforms for parents to exchange ideas in relation to the potential of the upbringing of generations of well-educated Arabs who master English as an impeccable step towards flourishing investment and tourism in the Arab world, in addition to restoring the image of the Arab region as a peaceful, progressive region, and of Islam as a religion of tolerance and compassion (Islam et al., 2013: 10, see also Shah, 2011). In this sense, the cooperation between formal and informal social agents (i.e. between teachers and family members) in the Arab world need to be promoted, because language teachers are likely to be pleased by the recognition that they are not alone in the effort to help language learners to learn better. Notably, 'National Interest' as a motivational power that is closely related to the ideal L2 self appears to be more desirable to Arabs and Asians than Europeans, largely due to the former's collectivist societies (i.e. being more interdependent with other members of society) (Islam et al., 2013, 10-11).

The findings at the first stage of this research revealed that the participants, especially those from the oil-rich Arab Gulf States, did not sufficiently capitalise on the availability of expatriates from Africa or Asia to practise their English with. This finding, as Baker (2012: 62) claims, may be partially attributed to their lack of knowledge of 'intercultural awareness' (i.e. an understanding of not only one's culture but also the cultures of multilingual speakers

of English worldwide). For this reason, most participants at the second research stage seemed to be reluctant to mingle with other international students from other cultural groups. The association of culture and language has been a point of much debate by researchers in the field of second-language teaching and learning (e.g. Byram, 1998, Kramsch, 2009). Baker (2012, 2015), for example, points out that the cultural awareness that is limited to learners' national cultures or Anglophone cultures is likely to be inadequate to achieve intercultural communicative competence in a world where the use of English by its L2 speakers is escalating dramatically. Based on this, English language classrooms in the Arab world are supposed to enhance 'intercultural awareness' as prerequisite for promoting the students' 'International Posture' (i.e. the desire to use English to connect to the international community). Baker (2012) echoes this point, stating that

The ELT classroom is a site in which learners, and ideally teachers, are necessary engaged in multilingual and multicultural practices that provides the ideal environment in which to develop ICA [intercultural awareness] and to prepare users of English to communicate in global settings (Baker, 2012: 70).

According to Baker (2012: 68), 'intercultural awareness' can be applied in English language classrooms by allowing students to critically evaluate images and descriptions of local and other cultures found in English learning materials and traditional and electronic media (e.g. television, newspapers or the internet). Moreover, language teachers can introduce their experiences of other cultures as content for the classroom through, for example, reading texts or discussion topics (ibid).

9.3.3 Enabling L2 Learners to ‘Speak as themselves’ with their Preferred ‘Transportable Identities’

It has been shown in Chapter 8 that English in the Arab world often loses its function as a ‘language for identification’ for a large number of language learners, largely due to the in-school-English/out-of-school-English dissonance in addition to the dominance of instrumental-prevention force related to the ‘ought-to self’ on their motivational orientations (i.e. trying to avoid possible negative outcomes and to meet the goals foisted on learners by others such as parents, teachers or social pressures) (see Henry, 2014: 98-99; Lamb and Budiyo, 2013: 18-19; Palfreyman, 2014:180-184). In this sense, Arab learners of English are likely to be treated by their teachers as abstract L2 learners, and their interests not taken into account. As a consequence, the majority of LLSs deployed by the participants in this study (especially by those educated in the public sector) in their homelands went under the category of ‘compulsory strategy use’ (i.e. exam-oriented strategies), and were essentially imposed by their English teachers in formal settings.

Based on this, Ushioda (2011b: 21-22), as explained in Section 8.3.2.1, has underlined the salience of creating an enabling environment for learners to ‘speak as themselves’ and to ‘engage and express their own preferred meanings, interests and identities through the medium of English’ (Ushioda, 2011b: 17). Falout (2014: 287) in turn points out that Ushioda (2011b) in her seminal paper has recognised that English constitutes part of the social fabric of people’s daily lives, and thus English teachers need to engage with their students as ‘people’, and to know that ‘formulaic approaches to teaching language may disregard the potential growth of their students’ individual agency and participation’. In this sense, the incorporation of digital and mobile technologies into the classroom, for example, may help students to build their own personally relevant connections between what they do in and

outside of class (Ushioda, 2011b: 22 and Henry 2014: 98). Palfreyman's (2012) exploration of mobile technology (students' own camera phones), conducted at Zayed University in Dubai, is an excellent example of finding ways of supplementing learners' school-based language learning with the affordances related to their daily lives (for more elaboration of Palfreyman's study, see Section 8.3.2.1).

Suffice it to reiterate here the recommendation mentioned in Chapter 8, Section 8.4.3 that organising training sessions for Arab teachers of English by experts (preferably native speakers of English) seems to be essential in enhancing their perceptions of the importance and benefits of technology for learning and teaching English and providing them with greater knowledge of the appropriate models for incorporating technology inside the language classrooms and linking it to their students' daily lives. With advances in technology, policy makers and practitioners in the Arab world are simultaneously enabled and required to introduce authentic language materials at both school and university levels.

By following the above suggestions based on the findings of this research, individuals in the Arab world (and perhaps in other EFL contexts) will be more able to conceptualise a future vision of L2 that is more grounded in reality, whilst they may also be able to exercise a higher degree of choice in relation to the use of LLSs.

9.4 Recommendations for Improving the Effectiveness of Study abroad Programmes

As described in Chapter 3, phenomenographic research tends to focus on how a group of individuals understand a specific phenomenon at a collective level because each individual holds a merely partial awareness of that phenomenon (Åkerlind, 2012: 116). With this in mind and based on the findings of this research, I made the following recommendations addressing the learning motivations, expectations and goals of international students (chiefly

those of Arab backgrounds) while studying abroad. Notably, the participants of this study shared one main criterion - that they had no prior travel experience before arrival in the UK.

9.4.1 Advice for International Students (particularly those of Arab Backgrounds)

- 1) International students need to identify and refine their expectations and goals before study abroad. For example, they need to avoid making any cause and effect assumptions between the availability of an enabling English learning environment and an automatic improvement in English, without undertaking any strategic behaviour. This is because any learning goal can only be achieved by 'real action and participation (i.e. exercise of agency)' (Gkonou, 2015: 196).
- 2) They should equip themselves with some details about student life in the host country and about a prospective institution before study abroad (Benson et al, 2013: 145). They can do so through, for example, doing some research on the internet or through contacting previous local students who returned from that country after completing their academic programmes.
- 3) Before study abroad, international students need to develop their computer literacy because most of their academic work will be on or near a computer, using a host of technological tools such as word processing, electronic dictionaries, Dropbox, Mendeley Desktop, Mindjet and SkyDrive.
- 4) During study abroad, international students should continuously reflect on their learning goals, and explore strategies to overcome possible linguistic, academic and sociocultural challenges (Benson et al, 2013: 146). For example, they can participate in volunteering activities on their university campuses, in order to increase their opportunities of mingling with the host nationals. They can also deepen their understanding in their area of specialisation by participating in some workshops/seminars, for instance.

- 5) They need to reflect on their intercultural communication involvement. The communication between international students from different cultures can bring benefits not only from an academic aspect but also could boost their employability in a modern enterprise (Baker, 2015: 137-138).

9.4.2 Advice for Programme Managers and Tutors in the Host Country

The following recommendations are principally based on the findings of the present study:

- 1) Before study abroad, programme managers need to help students formulate realistic expectations of the aims and design of their specific study abroad programme. This can be partially achieved through organising face-to-face and/or electronic meetings between international students and programme coordinators, academics and campus directors (Benson et al. 2013: 158-159). Students' inquiries should be properly addressed without a misleading exaggeration about the university.
- 2) Study abroad students need to be directly informed by their personal and module tutors or other people (e.g. counsellors) about the diverse intercultural activities and other academic workshops that their university campuses offer. This is because many international students (especially those of Arab Backgrounds) are not fully cognisant of the importance of taking part in such activities, along with their limited experiences with technology to check the latest activities. For example, the participants in this study claimed that they had a problem with making their written assignments more critical, without being aware of the availability of free training sessions offered by their university in relation to fostering critical and analytical thinking skills. Related to this, the diverse cultural and religious backgrounds of international students need to be taken into account when organising social and intercultural activities.

3) Programme providers and tutors in the host country need to take measures to enhance the relationship between local individuals and study abroad students. For instance, British and European students in this study were sometimes reticent to work with other students on specific language learning tasks. Therefore, module tutors are required to manipulate the composition of the groups by themselves via ensuring that all study abroad students are involved in groups that include native-speaking local students. Consequently, they save face of some students and strengthen social cohesion inside the classroom. Additionally, study abroad programmes need to create a close link between theory and practice. For instance, the assessment methods of Fadi's MA programme were based on writing three assignments in accordance with the twenty cases that he diagnosed and treated during his work at hospital. This in turn enabled him to be in contact with NSOE inside and outside the classroom. In contrast, the assessment methods of other participants' MA programmes were essentially based on writing academic assignments.

9.5 Directions for Further Research

The outflow of Arab students, mainly those from the Arab Gulf region, to overseas institutions has encouraged me to conduct this research, with an aim of offering insights that may help them survive and succeed in new learning contexts. Underpinned by a sociocultural standpoint, the study has concluded that the 'encapsulated view' of LLSs (i.e. relating learners' strategy choice and use solely to their cognitive predispositions or personality traits) is likely to reflect no more than an improvised portrait of language learners' strategic language learning efforts. This is because the effort required for learners to develop their language needs to be based on an understanding of strategy use resulting from the ongoing interplay between learner agency and a host of contextual realities, including past language

learning experiences. Indeed, there are many more issues that need to be addressed in future research.

1) In this study, the concept of ‘shadow education’ (i.e. tutoring in English that is provided for a fee and that occurs inside and outside of formal settings for different purposes) was one of the major factors that shaped the participants’ strategy use, future goals and identity formation. As shown in Chapter 8, two participants (Fadi and Zainab) experienced one of the most ‘effective’ forms of ‘shadow education’ in their homelands, namely attending fee-paying private schools which employed competent/native speakers of English, and which attempted to create considerable opportunities for students to ‘speak as themselves’ (Ushioda, 2011b). This in turn directly or indirectly caused the two participants to deploy on occasion certain LLSs that were more internalised within themselves in order to master English (i.e. voluntary strategies). Their positive prior language learning experiences made the linguistic challenges they faced after coming to the UK less taxing than was the case with the other participants. Nonetheless, the findings of this study in relation to the impacts of ‘shadow education’ on language learners’ strategy use and L2 identity are difficult to generalise principally because of the limited number of participants along with the fact that this notion was not intended to be investigated in the first place. Rather, its influence appeared only after analysing the research data. This is arguably a fruitful area for further research, especially since ‘empirical research on shadow education is still in its infancy’ (Zhang and Bray, 2013: 78), and ‘English as a subject in the shadow education system has received comparatively less attention in the research literature’ Coniam (2014: 105).

2) This longitudinal qualitative study is, it is suggested, one of the few empirical studies, if not the only one, in the field of LLS research to capture a contextualised, holistic picture of a group of international students’ changing learning goals and language strategy use in addition

to their L2 identity development during their attendance on both short and long academic programmes (i.e. the pre-sessional language course and a postgraduate programme) in a study abroad context, including their past language learning experiences in their homelands (*i.e. before and during study abroad*). Nonetheless, it would be useful to carry out further research to examine international students' reflections on their entire sojourn experiences after returning home. In addition, contextual realities that either bolster or hamper them from the achievement of their ultimate visions defined at the end of the sojourn, and the strategies used in this regard need to be delineated (*i.e. after study abroad*). Since I still have very good relationships with six out of the eight participants after their return home, my future research plans include an empirical follow up of my participants' post-study abroad reflection. The changes to my participants' linguistic self-concepts and intercultural perceptions along with the strategies that they espouse to achieve the national and personal goals which were articulated at the exit stage of this research will also be explored.

3) The findings of this study largely aligned with the underpinning framework of activity theory concerning the understanding of human agency as 'the human ability to act through mediation, with awareness of one's actions, and to understand their significance and relevance' (Lantolf, 2013: 19). In this sense, language learners are not simply moved to learn what others teach them. Therefore, educators need to foster their students' potentialities to learn English, by giving them 'enough space and opportunity to enact their own agency and become more active learners' (Gu, 2009: 273). Based on the findings of this research, I have suggested certain practical steps that may help learners in EFL contexts verbalise realistic language learning goals and exercise a higher degree of choice in relation to the use of LLSs. These steps are 'adopting a near peer role modelling approach' (Murphey et al, 2014), 'fostering the motivational force of International Posture and National Interest' (Islam et al., 2013; Yashima, 2013) and 'encouraging L2 learners to speak as themselves' (Henry, 2014;

Ushioda, 2011b). Further work that investigates the possibility and outcomes of applying these suggestions in the Arab world (and perhaps also in Asian contexts) needs to be undertaken, both at a research level and within the classroom.

4) LLS research has often limited itself to formal educational settings, including the few studies underpinned by a sociocultural viewpoint (e.g. Donato and McCormick, 1994; Coyle, 2007). Coyle (2007: 77), for instance, defines LLSs as a ‘by-product of classroom culture’. This might be partially attributed to the belief that the responsibility of learners’ language learning rests heavily on language teachers’ shoulders (Gao, 2012). As a result, ‘vast swathes of the territory for language learning beyond the classroom remain undiscovered by research’ (Benson and Reinders, 2011: 2). Social networks in language learning beyond the classroom are a fairly new area for research, which would benefit from further investigation. In this study, for instance, the impact of family members, mostly parents, on the participants’ future self-guides and strategy use after coming to the UK did not actually disappear in spite of being geographically distant. All participants, especially in the second research stage, were under great stress, because they wanted to prove to their parents that they were successful on both the academic and personal levels. This influence of family members on Arab students while studying abroad might not be mirrored in some other modern societies, where a learner’s peer group appears to be as or more powerful than the family. Therefore, research on individuals from other places or countries with different sociocultural, economic and political conditions, in relation to the impacts of informal agents (e.g. family members, neighbours, and friends) on their strategy use and identity development would enrich the data base available.

9.6 Summary

In summary, this study is unique in that it is the first longitudinal qualitative research study that has targeted some Arab learners' dynamic and situated use of LLSs in both local and overseas academic communities from a sociocultural perspective, a perspective which has rarely been espoused in LLS research (Gao, 2010a, Norton and Toohey, 2001). Such dynamic strategy use resulted from the interaction of agency and contextual realities (e.g. social agents, assessment modes and the availability of technological tools) as it unfolded over a time span of seventeen months in the UK, and was influenced by their past English learning experiences. As described in Chapter 2 (Section 2.5.1), there are two notions that link the field of LLSs to sociocultural theory: 'strategic interaction with contexts, and goal-orientation' (Huang and Andrews, 2010: 20). The findings of this study found that the participants' choice and use of LLSs were always directed towards the achievement of specific learning goals, and these learning goals with their associated LLSs were often shaped and reshaped in accordance with the quantity and quality of support or hindrance that they received from other social agents, principally language teachers and parents. The changes in assessment modes and the availability of language learning resources (e.g. technologies) were also found to have mediated their strategy use. This study concludes by providing recommendations for Arab students (and possibly Asians) who are considering pursuing their studies abroad in English-speaking education systems and for educators in EFL and study abroad contexts.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Stern's (1975: 311-316) GLL Learning Strategies

1. A personal learning style or positive learning strategies;
2. An active approach to the learning task;
3. A tolerant and outgoing approach to the target language and empathy with its speakers; 4. Technical know-how about how to tackle a language;
5. Strategies of experimentation and planning with the object of developing the new language into an ordered system, and revising this system progressively;
6. Constantly searching for meaning;
7. Willingness to practise;
8. Willingness to use the language in real communication;
9. Self-monitoring and critical sensitivity to language use;
10. Developing the second language more and more as a separate reference system and learning to think in it.

Appendix 2 Description of Rubin's (2005: 37-44) Learner Self-management (LSM)

Framework

Procedures	<i>Planning</i>	It includes four steps: defining goals, setting criteria to measure goal achievement, task analysis and setting a time line.
	<i>Monitoring</i>	In monitoring, learners notice any problems they might encounter (e.g. ineffective application of one or more strategies, lack of attention focus or problems in understanding or expression).
	<i>Evaluation</i>	In evaluation, learners determine whether they have made appropriate progress.
	<i>problem identification/solving</i>	It refers to identifying some possible causes for their lack of success (e.g. use of an inappropriate set of strategies, insufficient knowledge about the topic, culture...etc).
	<i>Implementation of problem-solution</i>	It refers to trying out solutions to determine if they will lead to a better outcome.
knowledge and beliefs	<i>Task knowledge</i>	It refers to knowledge about task purposes (i.e. pedagogical or real life goals), task demands (i.e. resources, knowledge, strategies) and its nature.
	<i>Self-knowledge</i>	It is knowledge about personal characteristics, e.g. motivation, interest, ability, learning styles, self-efficacy and proficiency.
	<i>Beliefs</i>	General beliefs about learning (e.g. the belief that the responsibility for learning lies with the teacher) and more specific beliefs about language learning (e.g. the belief that boys are not good at learning a foreign language).
	<i>Background knowledge</i>	There are several kinds of background knowledge including: domain, cultural, linguistic, contextual and world.
	<i>Strategy knowledge</i>	It is knowledge about what strategies are, why they are useful, and when and how to use them. (Wenden, 1998: 518)

Appendix 3 A Sample of the Interview Schedule of Each Research Stage

First research stage

1. How do you feel about pursuing your higher studies in the UK?
2. How did you come to the UK (i.e. at your expense or you granted a scholarship)?
3. What kind of linguistic challenges do you face in your homelands? How did you deal with the difficulties?
4. When did you actually recognise the importance of English in your life?
5. Did the teachers in your homelands use to introduce their own materials?
6. Did you receive sufficient support from your family members in terms of English learning? If yes, how? If no, why?
7. What about the use of technology in the classroom?
8. Have you found sufficient chances to communicate with native/competent speakers of English in your homelands? If yes, how? If no, why?
9. What about the role of your classmates in facilitating your English learning?
10. Any outstanding event/person that encouraged/discouraged you to learn English in your homelands?
11. Where did you use to encounter or learn new words in your native country? And what did you do in order to consolidate your memory of new words?

Second research stage

1. What are the reasons that made you join the pre-sessional course in the Centre for Applied Linguistics?
2. Why do you think that learning English for?
3. What kind of help do you need most?
4. What is your current motivation?

5. Is the pre-session course up to your expectations so far? Any weaknesses?
6. Are the teachers using their own materials?
7. What about the use of technology in the classroom?
8. Any outstanding event/ person?
9. Have you found sufficient chances to communicate with native speakers of English? If yes, where? If not, why?
10. Where are you now living? What about your flatmates? Do you think they can play a role in improving your English?
11. Can you describe your preparation for the oral presentation?
12. Can you describe your preparation for the written project?
13. Where do you usually encounter or learn new words here? What do you do with the new vocabulary?

Third research stage

1. Comparing you of today and of the time when we first met, what differences have you made?
2. What do you think the similarities and differences between the pre-session course and the MA programme?
3. Do you think the pre-session course avail you in your MA programme?
4. Can you describe your preparations for your written assignments?
5. What is your current motivation?
6. Any outstanding event/person?
7. Who are you close friends now? Individuals who came from the same nationality of yours? International students? Or British? And why?
8. What about your relationship with your flatmates?
9. Which kind of challenges you are now facing? How do you deal with them?

10. What about the role of technology in your life now? Do you use it to improve your English? If yes, how? If no, why?

Fourth research stage

1. Why did you choose this research topic?
2. How did you choose your research topic? Did your dissertation supervisor play a role in this matter?
3. Why did you use a specific methodology in your study?
4. What do you think about your own identity as a researcher and as an academic?
5. Did you get a long time to get approval from your participants? How did you approach them?
6. What about your relationship with your dissertation supervisor?
7. What about your current motivation?
8. Did technologies help you achieve your goals? If yes, how?
9. Any person/event that either enhanced or deterred your learning goals?
10. What about your future plans?
11. Any other challenges that you faced during this stage?
12. Are you satisfied with your experience in the UK (both academic and non-academic aspects)?

Appendix 4 Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form

ورقة معلومات عن المشارك ونموذج الموافقة

➤ What is the aim of this study?

I am interested in exploring the difficulties that Arab learners often encounter after their arrival to the UK, particularly in terms of the English language, and how they deal with any language problems. In addressing this goal, I need to collect data from a group of university Arab learners who have recently come to the UK to pursue their higher studies.

ما هو هدف البحث؟

يهدف البحث بتسليط الضوء على الصعوبات التي تواجه عادة الطلاب الاكاديمين العرب عند وصولهم للملكة المتحدة. ومهارات تعلم اللغة المستخدمه للتغلب على هذه الصعوبات. لتحقيق هذا الهدف المنشود, فان البحث يتطلب جمع بيانات من مجموعه من الطلاب الاكاديمين العرب الذين وصلوا حديثا للملكة المتحدة لاكمال دراستهم العليا.

➤ What will participation involve? This research involves

1. One-on-one interviews with the researcher (around 12-16 interviews at the participants' convenience)
2. Keep a learner diary and/or e-mail correspondences with the researcher;
3. Write an essay about the participant's past English learning experiences

ماذا تتضمن المشاركة؟

- 1- اجراء 12-16 مقابلة بين المشارك بالدراسة والباحث (بالتوقيت والمكان الذي يناسب المشارك)
- 2- الاحتفاظ بمذكرات الطالب او التواصل عن طريق البريد الالكتروني مع الباحث
- 3- كتابة مقالة تتعلق بتجارب المتعلم السابقة بتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية

➤ How long will participation take?

The entire procedure will last from 10 July till the end of MA programme

كم من الوقت ستستغرق المشاركة؟

مرحلة جمع البيانات ستستمر بين العاشر من شهر تموز حتى نهاية الماجستير

As an informed participant of this research, I understand that:

بناء على موافقتي بالمشاركة في هذا البحث فانه يحق لي الاتي:

1. My participation is voluntary and I may cease to take part in this research at any time, without penalty.

1-مشاركتي طوعيه بحيث يمكنني التوقف عن المشاركة بهذا البحث باي وقت ومن دون ان يترتب علي اي عقوبه او غرامه

2. I am aware of what my participation involves.

2-انني على علم كامل بما سوف يتضمنه البحث

3. All my questions about the study have been satisfactorily answered.

3- جميع استفسراتي حول هذا البحث تم الاجابه عنها

I have read and understood the above, and give consent to participate:

لقد تم قراءه وفهم ماتم ذكره اعلاه وبناء على ذلك فانني اوافق على المشاركة بهذه الدراسه

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

(توقيع المشارك)

I have explained the above and answered all questions asked by the participant:

لقد تمت الاجابه على جميع الاسئله التي تم طرحها من قبل المشتركين

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

توقيع الباحث:

Appendix 5 A Sample of Interview Transcripts

The second interview with Khaled, the Saudi participant:

Speaker	speech	line
Anas	ممکن تتکلم عن الوضع العائلي وعن اهلك وعن عدد الاخوه	1
Khaled	اي طبعا مافي عندي مشكله والدي موظف حكومي ووالدتي لم تكمل دراستها عندي اربع اخوان	2
	دراستهم الجامعيه . ان ولدت بمدينة جده ولكن درست بمدينة الدمام	3
Anas	هل تنتمي الى الطبقة العليا؟	4
	لا انتمي الى الطبقة المتوسطة	5
Anas	بالنسبة لاختاتك شو هي دراستهم ؟	6
Khaled	دراستهم الجامعيه	7
Anas	تلقيت الدعم الكافي من الوالدين؟	8
Khaled	اي بصراحه وخاصه والدي بحيث شرحتلي اهميه اللغة الانكليزيه منذ صغري	9
Anas	من اي ناحيه بينك اهميتها؟	10
Khaled	شوف والله هو بيني بنه الشغل والتجاره بيعتمد على اللغة الانكليزيه. العالم معظمه يتكلمون	11
	اللغه الانكليزيه بحيث وقت بتروح الى مكان في العالم رح تواجه اشخاص يتكلمون اللغة	12
	الانكليزيه حتى وقت الدراسه لابد انه تواجه مراجع باللغة الانكليزيه.	13
Anas	اديش كان عمرك عندما بدأت بتعلم اللغة الانكليزيه	14
Khaled	كمرحله رسميه بدأتها بعد المرحله الابتدائيه بحيث بدأت بالمرحله المتوسطة بالسعوديه يلي يبدأ	15
	التدريس الرسمي فيها باللغة الانكليزيه	16
Anas	قبل المرحله المتوسطة ماحاولت تتعلم اللغة الانكليزيه؟	17
Khaled	اي طبعا مثل حروف وارقام اخواني علموني اياهم والبرامج التلفزيونيه نتعلم عن طريقها حتى	18
	احيانا بعض الكلمات مثل شو معنى الجوال او قلم . كنت اسالهم عن معنى هذه الكلمات.	19
Anas	طيب شو كان انطباعك حول تعلم اللغة الانكليزيه قبل قدموك للملكه المتحده؟	20
Khaled	بصراحه كانت اهميه اللغة الانكليزيه عندي راسخه وخاصه انه دراستي undergrad كانت	21
	باللغه الانكليزيه كلها من السنه الاولى مدتها اربع سنوات بالاضافه الى سنه	22
Anas	انت على الصعيد الشخصي متى ادركت اهميه اللغة الانكليزيه بحياتك؟	23
Khaled	حسيت بصراحه باهمياتها بشكل كبير قبل ماخل الجامعه وذلك بسبب انه طريقه التدريس باللغه	24
	الانكليزيه لذلك انا انا شعرت انه من الضروري لي ان اطور لغتي الانكليزيه	25
Anas	هل هناك اي حدث معين او شخص معين ساهم اما بتشجيعك او كان له اثر سلبي بتعلم اللغة	26
Khaled	الانكليزيه؟	27
	اثر سلبي بصراحه مارج اتكلم عنه لانه الحمد لله مافي احد اثر علي سلبي اما كثر ايجابي في مع	28
	بعض المدرسين خاصه المرحله المتوسطة كانوا سوريين وفي شخص من فلسطين كنت	29
	طريقتهم احبها بحيث كان مهمهم انه لا يخلصوا المنهاج فقط بل كانوا ايضا مهتمين بتعلم اللغة	30
	الانكليزيه ايضا بحد ذاتها يعني بحيث يشجعنا انه نحب اللغة الانكليزيه وكيف نتعامل معاها . حظ	31
	شي ببالي بانه اللغة الانكليزيه تختلف عن اللغة العربيه فهي لغه اخرى ولا تقيس على اللغة	32
	العربيه وهي نصيحه مهمه وافادتني كثيرا. كمان قدم لنا بعض الخطوات بانه كيف بتحسن تتعامل	33
	يعني اذا صادفت كلمه جديده شوف وين context الكلمه الجديده بحيث علمنا انه عن طريق	34
	مكانها	35
Anas	ممکن تعطي مثال؟	36
Khaled	كمثال كلمه teacher بانه هذه الكلمه مرتبطه مع كلمه طالب ومتعلقه بمهنه التدريس ولكن انا.	37
	بصراحه كنت افضل اني ارسم جدول واكتب بالانكليزي الكلمه وجنبها ترجمتها باللغه العربيه	38
	بالاضافه انا كنت احاول اكتبها اكثر من مره واحده لذلك سوف يساعدني على حفظ طريقه كتابتها	39
	كنت اكررها اكثر من مره في كشكول	40
Anas	كان الاستاذ يتكلم بالعربي ولا بالانكليزي؟	41
Khaled	الاولى من تعلم اللغة	43

Anas	كنت تحضر درس اللغة الانكليزية قبل ماتروح على المدرسه	44
Khaled	بصراحه لم اكن احضر دروس قبل الذهاب للمدرسه	45
Anas	حدث معين قبل مرحله الجامعيه ادركت فيها اهميه الانكليزي خارج المدرسه؟	46
Khaled	في بعض الاماكن يمكن تلاقي اشخاص يتكلمون اللغة الانكليزية فمثلا السائح او الحاج ممكن انه ياتي للملكه فمن الممكن ان تاتي وتسولف معاه.	47
	انت اتبعت هل الاستراتيجيه؟	48
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Khaled	اديش كان عمرك هون؟	51
Anas	13-14 سنه لذلك انا براي انه واحد ممكن يخلق فرص لكي يتعلم اللغة الانكليزية بالعمره او بالحج وبصراحه المحلات التجاريه اغلبها بالعربي	52
Khaled	قبل ماتجي على بريطانيا كان عندك صديق يتكلم باللغة الانكليزيه؟	53
Anas	في كم تعرفت عليهم من خلال شغلي بالامارات فكان معظمهم اجانب من الباكستان او حتى امريكان	54
Khaled	من ناحيه general English اي مهاره تعتقد انت بحاجة لتطويرها ؟	55
Anas	بصراحه الكتابه هي اكثر مهاره انا شعرت اني بحاجة لتطويرها والتي تتطلب ايضا ان يكون عندي مفردات جيده و قواعد ايضا	56
Khaled	شو هي الصعوبات التي كنت تواجهها قبل قدموك للملكه المتحده	57
Anas	صعوبات كثيره وخاصه خارج الصف ففي المجال الاكاديمي ممكن تتغلب عليها اذا فتحت الكتاب لكن معظم الصعوبات عندما تكون خارج الصف مثل في المطعم	58
Khaled	تشعر بالرضا عن مستواك؟	59
Anas	لا لانني اشعر انه كان لازم اشعر انني بحاجة لتطوير مهاره الكتابه	60
Khaled	انا بصراحه ماكنت احفظها اقول شو الفايده من انه احفظها احاول اكتبها بالطريقه يلي اقدر يلي ا عليها . اعمل يلي بقدر عليه ما كان مستوي جيّد ولكن كنت احاول معتمد على الكلمات المساعده الاستاذ كان يعطينا اياهم فكنت استخدم تلك الكلمات للتكلم عن احد الملوك مثل الملك عبد الله او لملك فهد. على الرغم من انه عندي معلومات عامه جيده عنهم لكنني لم اكن اعتمد عليها كثير وذلك بسبب انه لم يكن عندي القدره اني احفظها بالصيغه المطلوبه. بصراحه زملائي الذين كانوا يحفظوها بصم كانوا يجيبوا علامات عاليه. للأسف بالجامعه كانت الاسئله مؤتمته لذلك لم نستطيع تطوير لغتنا الانكليزيه بالكتابه	61
Anas	بالمدرسه شو هي بالمهارات اللغويه يلي انت بتشعر انك تعلمتها بشكل جيد؟	62
Khaled	القواعد بتصور افضل الشي لانه المدرسين كانوا يركزون عليه. اما بالنسبه للتكنولوجيا فكان بعض الاساتذه بالجامعه يستخدموا البجكتيور بالاضافه بعض الاساتذه كانوا يطلبون منا نسلم ولكن انا لم اشارك فيه وذلك بسبب انني لاحظت forum الوظائف بالايمل وايضا كان هناك عدد المشاركين فيه قليل والطلاب ما يتفاعلوا معاه بالاضافه الى انه شعرت انه المناقشه فيه ليست نافعه وخاصه انه ليس عليها علامات لذلك ما الفائدة من المشاركه فيه	63
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Khaled	هل حصلت على الدعم الكافي من حواليك	66
Anas	بصراحه حصلت على دعم معنوي من الوالد وذلك للأسف انه ماكان يعرف يتكلم انكليزي منيح ولكن هو يلي شجعني على اني ادرس الجامعه سعود التي تدرس الهندسه بالانكليزي لانها تعتبر من افضل الجامعات	67
Khaled	طيب الان بالنسبه للمفردات اين كنت تواجه الكلمات الجديده عندما كنت تدرس بالسعوديه؟	68
Anas	بصراحه technical terms كنت اواجهها بالسعوديه في الجامعه او بالصف بينما كنت كمان اواجه الكلمات الجديده ايضا خارج الصف في التلفزيون والاعلام وخاصه انها امتع من اخبار	69
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	كنت اكتبها بكشكول اكثر من مره عشان احفظها منيح	99
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